

LANDFEASTED



A. G. BICKLEY
AND
G. S. CURRYER.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

HANDBASTED

BY

A. CHARLES BICKLEY

AUTHOR OF "MIDST SURREY HILLS," ETC.

AND

GEORGE S. CURRYER

JOINT AUTHOR OF "THE BARN AT BECCLES," ETC.

VOLUME II.

London :

WARD AND DOWNEY,

12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON.

1890.

LONDON
PRINTED BY WOODFALL AND KINDER,
70 TO 76, LONG ACRE, W.C.

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
CONTRASTIVE RASCALITY	I

CHAPTER II.

IN SLIPPERY PLACES	26
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

A CUSTOM MORE HONOUR'D IN THE BREACH THAN THE OBSERVANCE	53
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

LAWFUL, BUT NOT LEGITIMATE	66
--------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING	83
------------------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

"THUS CONSCIENCE ——"	95
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

	PAGE
HE THAT KNOWETH TO SWIM CAN SAVE HIMSELF, OR ANOTHER	135

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROAD TO RUIN	157
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIST OF MISERY	173
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM	188
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

BUT WEAKNESS, SLOTH AND SIN MAKE MEN AS LEAVES ON EDDIES	205
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNWELCOME MONITRESS	224
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

I WILL NOT GO—BUT AFTERWARDS REPENTED, AND WENT	237
--------------------------------------------------------------	-----

HANDFASTED.



CHAPTER I.

CONTRASTIVE RASCALITY.

ON his way home Tyler had recognized through the red curtains of the alehouse the figures of its accustomed toppers gathered round the cheery ingle, and had been sadly tempted to seek its shelter for warmth, welcome and forgetfulness. He was cold and thirsty, his anger had parched him, and he recollected that he had promised to make one of the company of revellers, but to-night he felt he dare not trust himself; if he did he should drink, and if he drank he would talk,

and if he talked others would know as much as himself.

Arrived at home he found the house silent and dark, save only for a dim and dying fire. The household had all gone to bed long since. He spent some time in fruitless efforts to procure a light from the embers ; at length, tiring of his somewhat unsatisfactory amusement, he dragged a chair in front of the hearth, kicked off his boots, and sat down to think. The immediate result of his deliberations was a resolve to get drunk forthwith quite alone, and with the least possible delay. Yes, a solitary "drunk," that was the prescription for his mood, the sole remedy for his sleeplessness.

Acting upon this happy inspiration, he proceeded to search for the necessary implements for producing a light, not an easy task in his present frame of mind ; in fact, so distraught was he, that he felt and fumbled,

like a stranger, in his own house ; not recognizing the familiar tinder box when his nerveless and insensitive fingers touched it, as they did in their wanderings more than once.

This second attempt having proved as abortive as the first, and having happed upon a flagon in the course of his wanderings, he remembered that it was as easy for him to find the cyder cask without as with a light, so he descended the steps which led to the cellar in the dark, jug in hand, to draw the wherewithal of happy oblivion.

Now it is a well-known fact in Wessex, that stooping over a cyder cask will drive the blood into a man's head, and, consequently, if he only stoops long enough, it will make him unsteady on his legs. Tyler was already intoxicated with self-contempt and baffled rage, and the act of, and attitude necessary to, drawing the cyder completed.

his muzziness ; so that the well-worn steps miscounted themselves, and in endeavouring to tread on a step which existed only in his imagination, he stumbled, and the jug was precipitated with a crash on the stones which floored the kitchen.

Arthur Crosby, bootless, wigless, coatless and otherwise generally at his ease, was indulging in a quiet pipe of tobacco. Finding some difficulty in adapting himself to the early hours, and severely domestic habits of the household, he chose this method of passing the earlier hours of the night as an alternative to the tedium of sleeplessness ; and the unwonted sounds of some one stirring in the kitchen, and wandering into the cellar, at the unheard-of, not to say dissipated, hour of nine o'clock, had filled him with interest, almost curiosity. When these abnormal phenomena culminated in a crash, followed by a string of oaths which made

up in depth for what they lacked in loudness, he was so excited that he got up from the chair in which he was sprawling, and, opening the door of his sitting-room, inquired,—

“ Here, what’s the matter ? ” but catching sight of Tyler, his curiosity vanished, and merely remarking, “ Oh, it’s you,” he was about to withdraw, when something odd in the rueful expression on the mayor’s countenance arrested his attention, and he continued, “ Pretty old fly-by-night my landlord has become during my absence. Why, man, what’s the matter, wandering about the house at this time of night in search of something to drink ? You look as if you were trying to find a bad headache. Here, come in, I’ll give you a drop of something that will set you up in headaches for a lifetime.”

“ No, Mr. Crosby, thank’ee, sir. It’s not for the like’s o’ me to come and sit and drink wi’ the likes of you, but I’ll thank’ee for the

loan of a light to clear away this muck wi'."

Under cover of this plausible excuse, the worshipful mayor once more essayed to obtain a drink of cyder, and this time was rewarded by success.

Having drawn another jugful of cyder, besides indulging in a copious draught in the cellar, Tyler reascended to the kitchen, where he placed the liquor on the table, lit a rushlight, and then went to the door of Crosby's room to return the borrowed candle.

As he opened the door, Arthur looked up from a game of quadrille he was playing with three imaginary partners, a dismal proof of his absolute ennui.

"Ah, Tyler, it's you, sit down," said Arthur abstractedly; then catching sight, through the open door, of the jug of cyder, he added, with a twinkle of mischief, "Gad's

life, my worthy landlord, better bring in the jug, it may feel lonesome outside."

Tyler sheepishly did as Arthur suggested, and while that gentleman again became absorbed in his game of quadrille, drank his cyder, and gazed with growing stupidity into the fire. The fire, the cyder and the silence wrought upon Tyler until he became restless, and the violence of his movements, as he reflected upon the harsh treatment he deemed he had met with from his ancient crony Steele, at length attracted Arthur's attention.

"What are you fidgeting about, what's amiss?" he demanded. "Have you drunk all that cyder? Then try some of this," and Arthur handed his guest the bottle of usquebaugh that was standing on the table.

Tyler muttered some evasive reply to the other's questions, but he seized the bottle

eagerly, and helped himself freely to the fiery spirit.

It was not long before the potion took effect, for Tyler, like most Wessex folk, was unaccustomed to such potent liquor, but he presently took the bottle again and helped himself to a more liberal draught than before.

As he raised the liquor to his lips, his hand shook, and the glass rattled against his teeth.

Arthur looked up curiously.

“What the devil has happened, Tyler?” he asked.

“Nought to speak on.”

“Then you are easily upset.”

“Ain’t it enough to upset a man when them as you’ve served deserts you as soon as you gets into a tight place, in a manner of speaking?”

“So you are in a tight place? I thought

as much. But who has deserted you, as you call it ? ”

At this query Tyler, whose inebriety was increasing every moment, lurched heavily from his chair, and, conscious of the instability of his equilibrium, clung to the oaken table with one hand, leaving the other free for purposes of gesticulation.

“ Mishter Crosby, sir, you look here. Ain’t I a very byeword for a good name i’ this town ? ”

“ A very paragon, Mr. Tyler, I assure you,” drawled Arthur, who began to find his drunken visitor amusing.

“ Knew you’d say so ; of course you’d say so ; never knew anybody say anythin’ else mysen. If I bean’t respected far and wide, why should they have made me mayor seven years ago, and kept me to it ever sin’ ? Answer me that.”

“ Really, Mr. Tyler, looking at the ques-

tion in an impartial manner, I must confess I cannot tell."

"Why, why, if I'm not respected, an' trusted, an' loved, in a manner o' puttin' 'en, would they 'a made me alderman of the Guild?"

"Not without violating every canon of good taste," replied Arthur.

"Course not, Mishter Crosby; you're a a gen'lman of discernment—hic! Now, Mishter Crosby, you tell me who a' done as much for this town, an' made 'en envy of all the towns for miles about, so prosperous be 'en?"

"Can't for the life of me say," answered Arthur. "Don't know many gentlemen in this neighbourhood."

"No; you're stranger—hic!—worse for you. But I can tell 'ee. Why, I've done it all. Trade o' the place, 'twor no good till I took the Guild. Folks were let start just a'

mun happen. How many people a' started sin' I took it? Answer me that."

"Far be it from me to deny it, Mr. Tyler. I'm sure, i' faith, that you would prevent anybody getting a living in the town if you could."

"Proudsh t' hear you say so, Mishter Crosby. That's what I said to the fool when he told me I'd taken care there wor no other blacksmith i' the town. I shaid, 'tis true—hic!—mor'n there is another saddler, curse him!"

"Oh-h-h!" ejaculated Arthur, enlightened.

"Ain't I kep' every 'prentice o' his out o' the place? And what thanks do I get for it? Answer me that, Mr. Croshby—man o' sense!"

"'Tis a censorious and thankless world. Have another drink, Mr. Tyler," said Arthur, pouring a most liberal libation into the mayor's cup.

Arthur was becoming interested, although he could not have told why. He had no grudge against Steele ; in fact, in his lazy fashion, he was rather partial to a man who treated him with so much deference, and the transparent honesty of Elsie's father had amused him in contemptuous sort.

Mr. Tyler, having refreshed himself, proceeded, with increased thickness and difficulty, leaning more heavily on the table in his endeavour to discover, somewhere between himself and it, a reliable centre of gravity.

“ Said I wanted to make ’en as big a knave as I be ; said he wor honest and well-faced. Ain’t I as honest and well-faced as he is ? What’s he done—answer me that—while I’ve bin on the bench as mayor, a workin’ early an’ late for the Guild, while he be mindin’ his own concerns, the husbird ? Called me a knave an’ a grinder o’ the poor ; said I wanted to make ’en a scoundrel like

mysen ; said I grew fat on other people's starvation. 'Tis a liar. Should I a' wanted to go to he if I'd fattened on other folk ?"

"What did you go to him for? Drink up that stuff and have some more," said Crosby.

By this time Tyler had reached the maudlin stage, and the possibilities which Arthur's question suggested completely overcame him, and he began to cry profusely.

"If all folk were but like you, Mishter Croshby, you'd none desert an old friend as you might save from ruin by lifting a little finger, so to put it—not like yon scoundrel, curse him !"

"No, indeed, Mr. Tyler ; I'd lift a great deal more than my little finger to him, I assure you."

"Now, you look here, Mishter Croshby, you wouldn't like to see an upright man as had spent his time, day in and day out,

a-workin' for all i' the town, come to ruin. Your father, many's the time he helped me, God rest him ! He wor a good man, he wor. Many's the time, when a 'prentice wanted to set up in business agin's master, your father, wi' his book-learning, has showed me the way to prevent him, an' saved a honest Guild-fellow from ruin—ay, many's the time. If the townsfolk only knowed how he helped 'en through me, they'd bless his name. Why am I the only blacksmith in the town ? It's all thanks to your father. Give me some more drink, and I'll tell 'ee about it. When old Needham, who had the forge by the upper bridge, died o' the sweat ten year or thereby agone, his widow wanted to claim what she called her Guild rights, and get her 'prentice to work the forge for her. 'Twas a good business, that o' old Needham's—the best business in the town, for sure. I soon stopped her having the 'prentice, trust me ;

and then the old hag came to our morning talk, and said she'd a right to have a journey-man. 'Twor no good ; I seed your father, an' he says to me, the statutes be as clear as print. Ses 'ee, you mun give her her right. I tould him 'twould ruin me, an' he says, 'You make her show as she's a widow in law ; 'tis the only way.' An' then he found out that she'd never been to church, but were only handfasted after the heathenish way they have in Purbeck where she comed from, an' he comes and tells me, he do, God bless him ! I refused to let her set up, I did, though that Steele and one or two more wor for letting her ; but I knew the law, I did, an' I told her she were only his missus, and no widow at all. That was your father, Mishter Croshby—a good man, poor heart !”

“Gratified, I'm sure, Mr. Tyler, to hear you speak so highly of my father. It always gives me pleasure to hear of anyone doing

good by stealth and earning the opinion of worthy men, especially when it happens to be my own father," interposed Arthur. "What do you mean by being handfasted, Tyler?"

"They have a way in these parts, Mr. Crosby, among the common folk o' livin' together for a year to see how they like it, and then if they gets on together they marries i' the church."

"And if they don't like?" interposed young Hopeful.

"Why, if they don't like, they each goes their own way, o' course."

"Which means, I suppose, that the subsequent marriage is more often omitted than not among these worthy couples; at least it was so in the case of the lady you refer to, a most providential circumstance in your case, Mr. Tyler, for which I trust you were duly thankful. And is this laudable custom as widely known and practised as it deserves

to be ? for it strikes me as a most convenient and sensible arrangement."

"Ay," asked Tyler, "what dost mean ?"

"Are people handfasted now ?"

"Bless your soul, lots of 'em, an' the poor fools think that comin' afore the Mayor wi' it makes it legal like."

"Oh ! then you perform the interesting ceremony—very nice."

"If 'em pays me."

"What do they do ? I always like to be accurate in my information."

"Do ? there ain't nought to do, they only comes an' tells me and I listens and pockets their money."

"It must form an agreeable part of your duties as Mayor, Mr. Tyler, to say nothing of it as a source of income."

"They don't come afore me at the tholsel, not they, they comes to the forge. As for money, there's none so much o' that among

they folks, but I get's a bit now an' then. By-an'-bye the woman gets far gone an' I threats to have her whipped i' Bridewell as a nameless jade, an' the poorest finds a bit then, I tell 'ee," and Tyler favoured his guest with a nod and a knowing wink.

"Exactly so, upon my credit. I perceive, then, that there are more ways of turning an honest penny than I had been led to suppose ; still, in my consummate innocence, I should hardly have connected blacksmithing and blackmailing as branches of the same industry. But what has all this to do with our mutual friend the saddler ? I presume, to put it in plain English, that he refused you a loan."

"He did, the scoundrel !" replied Tyler angrily. "Let me get a chance, an' I promise thee I'll be upsides wi 'ee."

"An entirely laudable resolve, but not to the purpose," returned Crosby ; "the bottle is at your elbow, pray help yourself."

When Tyler had complied, Crosby continued indifferently, "And now pray tell me, are your embarrassments serious?"

Drunk though he was, Tyler pricked up his ears and looked furtively at Arthur, but the half-formed hope died down in his heart before the easy nonchalance of the other, whose whole attention seemed concentrated upon the artistic perfection of a succession of smoke rings which he appeared to be excogitating from his inner consciousness.

"Because it strikes me," continued Arthur, when at length the last member of the smoky procession had disappeared in the twilight over their heads,—“it strikes me, my friend, from your evident perturbation, that you're in a damned mess, and that it may be just the most fortunate circumstance in nature that the son of my estimable father should be lodging in your house at this particular time.”

“ And why ? ” anxiously questioned Tyler with reviving hope, which assisted the progress of his sobriety.

“ Why,” replied Crosby slowly, “ for the simple reason that I feel disposed, if you will allow me the pleasure, to offer you my assistance ; no thanks, I beg,” as Tyler eagerly reached out his dirty hand to grasp the thin taper fingers which rested carelessly on the table. “ Believe me, I never so far forget myself as to do what is vulgarly known as a disinterested action, but as I am at present in the dark concerning your affairs, perhaps it will be as well if you tell me how much you want.”

The effect of this speech upon the blacksmith was every way remarkable. In the first place it sobered him, for he instantly perceived that he needed all his wits if he was to do justice to his cupidity. It was evident that Crosby intended in some way to

make use of him to effect an ulterior purpose, and the thought which immediately occurred to the blacksmith was, that whatever the service might be which Crosby required, he should pay for it.

“What am I to do for this?” queried the blacksmith suspiciously.

“Do, my good fellow? Well to begin with, I think you had better name the amount.”

“Two hundred pounds would clear me, taking things first and last.”

“And how much do you require for your immediate and more pressing necessities?”

“Well—er, about sixty pounds,” replied the blacksmith.

“May I take it that sixty pounds would be sufficient to maintain your credit?”

“Yes,” said Tyler, “I reckon that would about keep me on my legs for the present.”

“Will you have bank bills, or guineas?” asked Crosby indifferently, as he rose and

crossed the room to an old-fashioned padlocked desk which he proceeded to open.

Tyler could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, and his mind misgave him as to whether he was really awake or only dreaming. To him it was flatly inconceivable that any man in his sane senses should be prepared to treat that most sacred commodity money in such a spirit of careless indifference. To his mind there was something almost unholy in Arthur's levity.

"May as well sign this," said Arthur, passing a simple form of acknowledgment which he had just drawn. "I suppose you have not any securities or anything of that kind that you wish to offer?"

Tyler was too dumbfounded to reply, so he mechanically scanned and signed the document. Meanwhile Arthur, with a sarcastic smile upon his face, was evidently tickled at his bewilderment.

Very gradually Tyler realized what had happened, and as he did so his countenance underwent a succession of unpleasant changes. His features, bloated and puffed by sleeplessness, twitched and worked with the conflicting emotions of greed and cunning, not unmingled with low fear, as to what this unlooked-for generosity portended ; but at length the dawning thought of the vengeance he should now be enabled to wreak upon the unlucky saddler chased all other expression from his face. How he gloated over the little pile of golden guineas, and laughed, with an unpleasant chuckle in his throat, whilst his dirty fingers scrabbled among the coins !

“ Take that away,” said Arthur ; “ I want to go to bed.”

Tyler gathered up the money, and put it into his pocket with ostentatious care.

“ I’ll go, sir ; I won’t keep ’ee out o’ yer

bed, sir. I'll go at once; anything you wishes, I'll do. I can't thank 'ee in words, but I'll thank 'ee in deeds, if I have to go to the end o' the world for't. I've a bit o' power i' this place, sir, and you may do what you will so long as I be Mayor. You've helped me, you have, when they as owes a'most the bread they eats turns me out o' their housen; but you've gi'en me the means, an' I'll be upsides wi' 'en yet. I'll be that man's curse in his downsittin' and his uprisin', an' on his kith an' his kin unto the third an' fourth generation. Let Steele look out for his'sen; I'll make one in every bargain he has. On'y let him deal out o' Guild, an' afore hours. Let me catch his wife, or that girl o' his'n, doin' wi' market chaps after the market be closed—ay, I'll ha' every poun' o' butter his sister Rose sells to be weighed i' the tholsel. I'll ha' toll for every beast that nevv'y he's so set on drives thro' the town.

Yes, Steele, look out for thy'sen ! Thou an' thy folk shall learn what I can do ! ”

“ Exactly,” ejaculated Arthur, as he opened the door for his visitor, and bowed him out with cynical politeness. “ A precious rascal, that landlord of mine,” he mentally added, “ but a useful man if used, and I fancy I may want to use him.” And Arthur addressed himself to sleep, murmuring, “ A most precious rascal !

CHAPTER II.

IN SLIPPERY PLACES.

ARTHUR'S stay in Winterbourne would have been intolerably dull had it not been for the saddler's pretty daughter. Her freshness, and simple, unaffected enjoyment of his company and conversation, flattered his vanity, and filled him with a gentle self-complacency, and admiration of Elsie as a girl of great good taste and unusual beauty.

In truth, Winterbourne presented very few attractions to a gentleman so constituted as our hero. He had heard with careless ears that the Romans had once made a camp there, but the amulets and fibulæ that were

daily brought to light by that most industrious, and least cantankerous, of archæologists, the plough, were to him but so much uncleanly rubbish. The district was wholly agrarian, but for matters of the country-side he had no taste. Neither did the quiet valleys and boldly-defined elm-covered hills offer any appeal that he was capable of responding to. Nor did the interests of the little town appeal to him more forcibly ; the petty questions of trade, the intricate workings of the Guild, the kindly curiosity of each regarding the life and doings of the other, bored him. The almost socialistic life of Winterbourne, which to a latter-day antiquary would afford proof, almost strong as Holy Writ, of its having been the whilom seat of a village community, wearied him by the closeness of its scrutiny. Nor could he find anything congenial in the old-world customs which the inhabitants delighted to

perpetuate with true Wessex conservatism ; or the folk-tales and songs of dwarf, gnome and goblin, which it formed the greater part of their fireside amusement to repeat.

Arthur Crosby was essentially what was then known as a "Macaroni," a mere townsman who fancied that life was wholly contained within the radius of a mile from Pall Mall, and that life in the country was at best but a bad job—a kind of social banishment, which it behoved him to do his best to lighten, a mere sorry sort of existence.

He would have been welcome enough at meets, or the coarse revels which followed them in the halls of the bucolic squires who constituted the West Wessex hunt ; for since his father's death his accession to the baronetcy would in itself have been a sufficient passport to the hospitality of the best landowner of the district. Had it not been for his known hostility to the reigning

family, which necessitated his following his uncle's unpalatable advice and preserving his incognito whilst in retreat, he would, from his mere taste for social intercourse, have plunged into the simple pleasures which these manorial boors were able to offer him, although his doing so would have been a condescension which he would have manifested, and they would have felt.

Still Crosby was naturally a man of gregarious habits, and so, being precluded from the society he would have preferred, was fain to content himself, with what grace he could, with the next best the little town afforded. The houses of the clergyman, the apothecary, and the attorney would all have been open to him had he chosen, but Crosby could not tolerate that their pettifogging gentility should come "betwixt the wind and his nobility." He was like the prince who could be gracefully familiar with the peasant,

but could not with safety unbend to the peer ; for while the one might venture on familiarity, from the other he was sure of receiving that humility of subservience which was a tacit compliment to the superiority of his position.

This being so, Arthur condescended to enter with considerable gusto into the lower social life of the place, and speedily earned a reputation as a boon companion and a gentleman devoid of pride. He liked to lounge on the bridge, the resort of all the idle fellows of the town, and chat with the men and women as they returned from working in the fields ; to loiter in the market-place, and feign an interest he never felt in the thousand and one commonplaces he despised ; and most of all to mark the servile half-hush with which the frequenters of "The Red Lion" were wont to greet his appearance. Here he was "Sir Oracle" indeed, his

lightest word was law, and "Master Crosby" reigned supreme. An affectation of easy good-nature, a spurious generosity born of carelessness, combined to surround him with a halo of popularity very soothing to his feelings. What wonder, then, that most of his evenings were spent in company so congenial, and so ready to recognize the honour and dignity which his presence conferred upon it?

Through the medium of the village hostelry he was afforded ample opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of most of the burghers of the town, who, in accordance with the prevailing custom, used the inn both as a club and a trade exchange, and who, one and all, were flattered by his easy familiarity, and loud in their praises of his amiability and other numerous virtues. In fact, to such a height of popularity did Arthur Crosby attain that had he wished to

take up the freedom of the town, it is doubtful if even the great Mr. Tyler would have been powerful enough to prevent him carrying his design into execution.

Arthur's growth in popular favour was not without its effects upon Elsie; the little maiden felt her heart glowing with pride at every laudatory remark. She always knew it. She was sure that his irritability and haughtiness, the irreligion, not to say profanity, of his conversation and bearing, with every other perceptible defect, were all due to his accident; it had shaken his nerves as well as broken his leg, and shattered his temper more completely than the falling pinnacle had dislocated his bones. Had she not told Hetty as much when that young lady had appealed to her to join in her tirade against the interesting, if somewhat trying, invalid? Had she not stood up for him when her mother's homespun, but by no

means unjust, criticism had wounded her to the heart ? Had she not withstood her aunt's contumely, and even consented to quarrel with one of her kindred for his sake, confident that sooner or later her aunt would be forced to confess how unjust and cruel had been her coarse imputations against the man of her niece's idolatry ?

Yes, Mr. Crosby was a gentleman, and Elsie rejoiced secretly in the little thrills of embarrassment which his mere proximity caused her. Then, too, she was quite sure that her hero was something more, and someone other, than the plain Mr. Crosby he chose to represent himself. Certainly he was something more than a yeoman, and the lords of the surrounding manors had never shown to Elsie so polished a specimen of humanity ; he was a knight, she felt sure, at the very least, possibly a justice of the king's peace, like the owner of the great house,

Melcombe Regis, hard by; and the girl's breath would come in short gasps of delicious awesomeness as she pictured to herself what might be the possibilities of the mystery which enshrouded her hero.

It is true she was sometimes sorely puzzled as to *why* he should be compelled to live in such an obscure place as Winterbourne, for Elsie was sufficiently advanced, and had read enough, to know that her native town was not the hub of the universe. Also why should he so studiously avoid mixing with the people belonging to the hunt, or with the parson and the others who formed the best society in the town, a society to which she looked up with hopeless reverence as something altogether above her station?

And graver thoughts would fill her mind and cloud her brow when the question of her own feelings and position towards him forced itself, as it would ever and again, upon her

attention. This was a subject which filled her with the uneasiness of such misgivings that she had almost schooled herself into a habit of closing her mental eyes and stopping her mental ears against the sight and the sound of its unpleasant suggestions. She recognized that she was drifting, whither she would not think, and how she did not care to investigate. Where it was all to end she neither knew nor cared; the way was pleasant, very pleasant, the sky was clear overhead in the morning of her young life. The birds carolled merrily from the shade of the many trees that lined the way.

It is difficult, while life is lusty and youth is strong, to appreciate the gravity of much in the trend of things.

So the months of autumn and early winter passed on towards Yule-tide. Arthur lived his easy life of good-natured loafing and Elsie dreamed her dreams, little recking that

for every one would come an hour of bitter repentance, and every day the two young people managed to see something of each other.

Now it chanced that the week before Christmas the winter fair was held at Warehampton Canonicorum. This was a matter of much importance in Wessex, for hither came the farmers with their fattest cattle, and traders brought their finest goods ; to it came peddlers and chapmen from far and near, bringing the gayest assortments of stuffs that would attract their country purchasers, and booths and shows of every kind followed in their wake. Traders of the district were wont to attend it, knowing that there they would meet well-nigh all their customers, and so would have an opportunity of collecting debts and adjusting differences, while at the same time they could renew their stocks. The business part was soon

over, and then commenced the pleasure fair ; so the lads and lasses attended in force ; it was at once the wake and the great winter market of the neighbourhood.

This year the alderman was laid aside by an attack of gout, and Mrs. Steele, like a good wife, was loth to leave him ; from a business point of view this did not matter much, as Samson might well be trusted to do all that was needful and look after his master's interests. But Elsie was bitterly disappointed. The social etiquette of the district at that time forbade, if the girl's taste had not, that she should go with Samson alone ; besides which his horse would be too heavily laden with goods for disposal to carry even so light an additional burden.

On the night before the fair, however, an unexpected solution of the difficulty presented itself in the person of Hetty, armed with an invitation from the blacksmith for

Elsie to accompany himself and his daughter to Warehampton Canoncorum. He had not thought it necessary to inform his daughter that the invitation was at the direct instigation of Arthur Crosby ; and even if he had it is doubtful if the alderman or his wife would have found it in their heart to refuse their child the opportunity of sharing in the fun.

“ Father says you can ride behind him on the sorrel mare,” explained Hetty.

“ Then what is to become of you ? ” asked the invited one.

“ Oh, I am to be stuck on the pillion behind Mr. Crosby.”

“ Thank you,” said Elsie doubtfully, “ but I should be sorry to inconvenience your father.”

“ Tyler would none have asked thee, girl, if it wor goin’ to put him to ill-convenience.”

“ Thou’dst best go, lass, we shall have no

peace if thee doesn't," added her father testily, for a twinge of the gout had just got as far as his temper, and he was not going to be outdone by the magnanimity which this act on the part of the mayor clearly suggested. "We shall have no peace in the place an' thee stays at home. 'Tis kind of Tyler, go and enjoy thyself, lass. I wouldna' ha' missed Warehampton fair when I was thy age for aught."

"Oh, do come, Elsie; father and I will be very disappointed if you don't, and so will Mr. Crosby, for sure," said Hetty, putting her arm round Elsie's waist caressingly as they stood together.

So Elsie promised.

Although they had to start quite early on the following morning Elsie for once was up betimes, and presented herself at the mayor's house punctually at the hour fixed for starting. The horses were being led

round, and Arthur, booted and spurred, was chatting gaily to Mrs. Tyler, when the blacksmith appeared in great good spirits with the announcement that they had better start.

“Gadzooks, Mistress Elsie, thou art looking mighty fine. Thou’lt make some of our lads’ hearts ache afore night, I warrant me. She do look well, don’t she, wife?”

“The girl’s well enough,” admitted Mrs. Tyler, as the rest trooped towards the door.

Arthur was busily engaged in lifting Hetty into the pillion of his jennet, whose sleek black coat glistened in the frosty sunlight. A swift pang of jealousy shot through Elsie’s heart as she watched the pair, and, chide herself as she might, she could not repress a feeling of resentment against Hetty as she saw the girl in Arthur’s arms.

“That will none do, lass. Thou art too heavy for yon spindle-legged beast. Lift

her down, Mr. Crosby, she'll do better behind me on the sorrel. Do you take miss yonder ahint you, she's some stone lighter than my lass," said the mayor.

"As usual, you are a man of penetration, Mr. Mayor. I bow to your superior knowledge of horse-flesh," replied Arthur. "Has Miss Elsie any objections?"

Perhaps Miss Elsie had, but by the exercise of great self-command she did not express them; so the change was effected, and the party were soon well on the road.

As they passed through the town Arthur took care to keep as close to the sorrel as the proprieties of Winterbourne demanded. Only once he turned to his fair companion until he felt her warm breath on his neck, to inquire in a low tone of banter whether Miss Steele had any objections to riding so close to him; "because," he added, "I

supposed she wouldn't, when I arranged with Tyler to effect the exchange."

His only answer was a slight pressure from the arm that clasped him.

Once in the open country the jennet grew restless and dissatisfied with the easy ambles of his staid companion, and, try as he might, Arthur could not prevent the distance between himself and the blacksmith becoming considerably wider as they went on, at least so he said. More than once the jennet had to wait at the cross roads until the blacksmith, to whom the way was familiar, should come near enough to indicate their route.

On one occasion, when the blacksmith and Hetty were almost out of sight, Arthur's attention was attracted to an ancient house, half hidden in a grove of trees which surrounded it.

"Who lives here?" he asked Elsie.

"I don't know, isn't it a beautiful house?"

“Yes,” he replied, “it reminds me strangely of our place.”

“Do you mean your uncle’s house at Grassthorpe?” asked Elsie timidly.

“Oh, no!” replied Arthur, “that is a mansion in much more elegant taste. I meant my own place in Berkshire.”

“O—h!” said Elsie, too surprised to add more. Here was an unlooked-for confirmation of her high imaginings!

A minute or so’s ride brought them to the gates of the Chace, where, in accordance with the taste of the age, an enormous grille of bent and twisted iron had been substituted for the old carved oaken gates, and which was decorated with a huge emblazoned shield of arms.

The gentle science of heraldry is sadly neglected in these degenerate modern days, when the sole use to which it is put is to paint its mystic symbols on carriage doors

and hatchments, or stick them atop of a sheet of paper or on the label of a cheap and nasty brand of doctored wine, whereas in old days the owners of coat-armour carved or painted those symbols on everything everywhere, and all available occasions. Now a person riding through the country is reduced to the prosaic inquiry, "Whose place is this?" whereas a hundred-and-fifty years ago he could satisfy his own curiosity by the use of his eyes, and, moreover, make himself familiar with much of the family history, creditable or otherwise, of the occupants at a glance.

Now, Arthur Crosby being a gentleman, was, it is almost needless to say, versed, to some extent, in so particularly genteel a branch of knowledge as heraldry. Consequently he reined in the jennet to make an inspection of the gorgeous escutcheon.

Elsie was surprised, we might say almost

alarmed, as she heard Arthur muttering what sounded to her unsophisticated ear very like an incantation or unholy witch-charm ; as a matter of fact, he was simply reading, in a half audible tone, so much of the history of the family who lived at the house as they had seen fit to advertise on their front door.

“ First and fourth, sa. on a cross-rayonated, or, five gallthrops of the first, second and third, erminoise ; humph ! a bar sinister between two cinquefoils azure, surcharged Ulster.”

“ That sounds funny,” said Elsie, “ what is it you are saying ? ”

“ Merely reading the arms of the family,” rejoined Arthur loftily.

“ I don’t see any writing ? ” queried Elsie.

“ Silly child ! Don’t you understand that gentlemen have ways of making known to each other who they are without writing it

down in words, like a shopkeeper or an apothecary, for every bumpkin to read ? ”

“ Oh ! ” said Elsie, very much impressed. “ Do they do it with those little pictures and things ? Do tell me what they mean. ”

So Arthur explained that the place belonged to Sir John Swindlegait, whose mother was the illegitimate daughter of a great peer, with much more concerning the gentle and joyous craft, which filled Elsie with admiration at the vastness of his erudition.

“ What is the meaning of the little red hand on the queer pointed thing in the middle ? ” she asked.

“ Oh, that only means that he’s a baronet. ”

“ Do all baronets have a red hand, then ? ”

“ Yes ; see here, ” lifting the signet that hung at his fob for her inspection.

“ Then does this mean that you are a baronet ? ” asked the girl in a sinking tone.

“Well, child, and if I am you need not be so horribly alarmed. Baronets don’t eat good little girls ; at least, not always.”

“I knew you were not plain Mr. Crosby, as you gave yourself out to be,” said Elsie.

“You must be a small person of wonderful discernment,” said Arthur in a tone of banter. “And what made you think so, pray ? ”

“Oh ! why, because—because you are so different to other people—I mean—that I should think any one might see you were a person of quality.”

Just then the pair were hailed by a loud shout from the blacksmith.

“Elsie,” said Arthur, in a low, earnest tone, and very hurriedly, “you have my secret, child. I have kept it from every one else since I came here, and why I should have told you I cannot for the life of me think ; unless,” he added tenderly, “it be

because, as you say of me, 'you are so different.' However, child, you have my life, my honour, in your hands, and I believe you care enough for me to guard them both."

During the remainder of the ride Elsie's silly little head was too full to admit of her tongue being very busy. Her heart swelled with pride as she reflected that her hero had, as she believed, placed in her hands the two things he most valued, life and honour. And whilst Arthur chatted lightly with the blacksmith—for, for some unknown reason, the jennet had suddenly become tractable—Elsie could only answer in monosyllables to Hetty's attempts at conversation.

Once arrived at Warehampton Canonorum, Tyler proceeded immediately to business, leaving Arthur the care of the two girls, which charge, to do him justice, he fulfilled to the best of his ability, treating

them to cakes and ale, and all the shows and jerry-go-nimbles which the place afforded, skilfully managing to keep Elsie as much to himself as possible without appearing to neglect the blacksmith's daughter.

Elsie was filled with a perfect delirium of delight, although the frolic of the fair was less attractive to her than she would have believed possible yesterday, in the light of the revelation of the morning. These country people, with their homely manners and coarse clothing, struck Elsie, for the first time in her life, with a painful sense of insufferable vulgarity. Just before they were leaving she noticed a number of couples standing together, hand-in-hand, evidently the butt of many jokes, and much, not ill-natured, laughter.

"What are they going to do?" she asked Tyler, who had just come up to inform them that it was time to start.

“Han’fastin’; this fair be the great time for it,” explained the mayor gruffly, as he left them.

Things had not gone well with Mr. Tyler at the market; he found to his chagrin that he had made more than one bad debt, and certain sums of money on which he had been reckoning were not forthcoming.

“Handfasting!” exclaimed Elsie. “I wonder what Mr. Tyler means by handfasting.”

“Oh, it’s an old form of marriage they have about here,” said Arthur. “I am surprised you don’t know of it.”

“In Winterbourne the people always go to church to be married.”

“Not always, do they?” queried Arthur.

“No?” said Elsie, puzzled and curious.

“Not if they have reasons for keeping their marriage secret—family reasons, and that sort of thing, I mean, you know,” suggested young Hopeful.

“And does it do just as well?” asked Elsie innocently.

“What an absurd child you are! I suppose it does. Folks would hardly be fools enough to play at it if it did not.”

“No, of course not,” said the girl, in the tone of one satisfied without being clear upon the point.

Arthur regarded Elsie curiously. Was it possible that her simplicity could be quite genuine? If so he would be saved a great deal of trouble, and he hated trouble; so he was grateful to the girl for her innocence, and his gratitude made him yet more considerate and gentle.

The ride home formed a fitting conclusion to the most eventful day Elsie had yet lived through.

The early evening came full of stars; the air was crisp and lucent, and Elsie, in her seat on the pillion, looking through the wan

light, felt as if she were the only woman, alone in a wide, wide world of delicious unreality with the man she loved.

Tyler and Hetty, on the sorrel, had attached themselves to one of the numerous parties that came trooping from the fair towards Winterbourne, and Arthur had no difficulty in persuading the jennet to withdraw himself from the society of horses whose breeding was so far beneath his own.

Not much was said on the journey, but here was no lack of intercourse. Subtly the rarefied sensuousness of the man's nature asserted itself as a force from which the girl was powerless to free herself. Nor had she the least desire to break the perilous enchantment.

Poor little Elsie, your feet are in slippery places. You are bewitched by the basilisk eye of the tempter, which apes the guise and counterfeits the grace of holy love.

CHAPTER III.

A CUSTOM MORE HONOUR'D IN THE BREACH
THAN THE OBSERVANCE.

“MOTHER,” said Elsie next day, “I am going to Tyler’s to take back the cloak Hetty lent me last night.”

“Thou might’st ha’ chosen a more convenient season, girl. I think this junketing has turned thy head. Washing day a’ Monday, and now ’tis Thursday and ne’er a thing starched, besides all the crimping to be done against the Sabbath, if we bean’t to turn out a by-word to the town. An’ I’m none so sure that Tylers will want to see’ee either. Hetty will be busy, I’ll be bound. She bean’t

a gowkhammer mortal like thysen ; she'll none want the cloak till t' afternoon."

"I don't know. She might want to go out, mother. Shall I send Mattie ?"

"Well, Elsie, lass, thy father may say what he likes, but I do think sometimes as thou art a born natural. The Lord forgie me an' I be wrong ! Dost think thou canst take Mattie's place ? 'Twould be a pretty household if I took the work o' it out of busy hands and put 'en into idle ones. If thou mun go, get thee gone, lass, and make haste back. Lord o' me, the dispensations were merciful when they gi'e me only one child. Two like thee, Elsie, 'ud make any woman the parish noodle."

The consent was not given too gracefully, but for that Elsie cared nothing. Her mother's bark might be disagreeable, but it was chronic, and she knew of old time that there was no bite to follow it. Mrs. Steele

loved her daughter well enough to grumble at her with a full consciousness that it afforded herself relief and left no sting behind.

For once her mother was wrong ; Hetty was not busy, and she did want the cloak, but not so urgently as to prevent her having a few minutes in which to chat over the events of the previous day. Of these she was full, and Elsie soon discovered, to her great relief, that Hetty was quite unconscious of any tender passages which might have taken place between her friend and Arthur Crosby. Hetty was one of the single-minded unsophisticated souls that thinketh no evil because it does not know any to think, and from whom the most evident things escape like water from a duck's back. Consequently our scapegrace hero and the saddler's daughter might have engaged openly in what looked verylike love-making right under her

nose without Hetty being one whit the wiser.

At length the conversation, after touching on nearly every item in the fair, turned upon the row of couples who were being handfasted : the sight had had a great effect on Elsie, and had occupied no small share of her thoughts. Arthur Crosby had pointed out that it was usually undertaken when the persons concerned wished to keep their marriage a secret, but the openness with which it had been contracted at Warehampton Canonorum seemed to her to indicate that it was not considered disgraceful.

“ Did you see all those couples waiting to handfast ? ” she asked Hetty. “ How absurd they looked ! ”

“ Did you think so ? ” replied that practical maiden. “ I have seen them several times : so it did not strike me.”

“ I never heard of it before. I

thought people were always married in church."

"Yes, I used to. I suppose they do it to avoid the expense of a wedding. I know father said no more of his daughters should be married, Susie and Dolly's weddings cost so much."

"And they do it when they want to keep their marriages secret, don't they?"

"May be, Elsie; I do not think marriages ought to be kept secret myself; besides, there is always a witness. Only the other day some people came over from Somborough for father to be witness; he is mayor, you see. Here he comes, he can tell you all about it."

Elsie hardly cared for this source of information; but she was so curious on the subject that she made no objection to Hetty submitting her inquiry to the mayor.

"So you wants to know a bit about hand-

fastin', do 'ee, mistress?" said the mayor with a sardonic grin. "Well, I don't know that there's much to tell mysen. Still, what there be I knows better than any man, in a way of putting it. Hetty, get thee gone on thy mother's errand. And now, lass, what is it thee wants to know?" he added, as his daughter disappeared.

"Oh, it's not of any importance, Mr. Tyler," said Elsie, half shyly, "but I never heard about it before."

"An' not the only thing thou'st never heard on belike, but there be a sight of folk i' these parts who ha' never knowed any other form of marriage, an' it seems too that they gets on as well together as t'others, an' it don't cost such a sight o' money as when the parson does the job. I suppose you thinks 'tain't legal and all that sort o' thing. Folks mostly thinks what they don't do their sen must be wrong."

“ Oh no, I didn't think it was wrong, Mr. Tyler, only I never knew any one married that way.”

“ Ha, ha ; perhaps thou'lt tell me thou doesn't know old Dame Pebody, or Mistress Chandler, or John Coggan that has the inn at Hockley. If thou doesn't know them thy father does, for they be good enough customers o' his'n.”

“ Were they all handfasted ? ” queried Elsie.

Now Mr. Tyler had chosen these respectable illustrations—two of which were genuine, and the third a figment of his brain, introduced for the sake of mentioning a name with which he knew the girl must be perfectly familiar—for sufficient reason ; namely, that on the previous night, after the others had all gone to bed, he had paid a visit to Mr. Crosby's room for an interview *in camera*. He had been compelled to ask him for a further advance, and that delectable young

gentleman had conceded his request on condition that Mr. Tyler, being mayor, and holding sundry other dignified and responsible offices should on suitable occasion impart any of his varied stores of erudition to Mistress Elspeth Steele which he judged likely to be useful to a young lady in her position, especially upon the interesting topic of that most respectable usage known as handfasting. Here the mayor's features had relaxed into a coarse and diabolical grin truly repulsive to behold, while from his throat had proceeded a series of remarkable chuckles, resembling a cross between a laugh and a choke. Hereupon Mr. Crosby had bidden him not to be a fool, and to keep his eyes open for such opportunity as he might make in conversation when Miss Steele should be present for the worthy mayor to impart the aforesaid information, and in the event of such information resulting in a certain man-

ner which should be nameless, he had broadly hinted that Mr. Tyler's lease of the other's money might be converted into a freehold.

Mr. Tyler was a thrifty man, and his duty towards his family rendered it incumbent upon him to earn the money if possible, so he was very thankful that so early an opportunity had presented itself for enlightening Elsie upon a topic with which his patron was evidently so anxious she should be well acquainted.

So he replied to Elsie's query, "Yes, for sure, my lass, and so were dozens more o' the most respectable folk i' the neighbourhood. 'Tis no good naming o' names, or I could tell 'ee o' lots. I daresay I've witnessed the handfasting of a score or more."

"There is no service like there is in church, is there?"

"'Tain't no needs for a service; the man

and woman agrees, and says so afore me, and what more do 'ee want?"

"It all seems so odd to me," said Elsie meditatively. "To think of my having lived here all my life, and yet know so little of the people about me. It would have been different, I suppose, if I had had brothers and sisters."

"Mayhap. 'Tis good for thee thou hasn't any. Steele be a pretty warm man, but what he's got wouldn't go far among a lot on 'ee. Thou'lt be a bit on a prize for a man some day."

Elsie took no outward notice of the interruption, but its concluding compliment was not lost on her.

"I daresay there are other customs quite as curious as handfasting if I only knew of them."

"Don't see as there's anything curious about handfasting at all, mysen," said Tyler

dogmatically. "'Tis well understood i' these parts, and that be enou', according to my lights. Maybe 'tain't good enough for some folks wi' uppish stomachs."

"With what?" asked Elsie.

"I mean with folks as wants a mighty deal o' fuss made about all they do. 'Tis more sense, to my mind, to come and be handfasted quietly afore me than for the like o' poor folk to get wasting their money in junketings and gewgaws; time enou', an' they mun, when they has to go to church."

"Oh, then they do have to go to church after all?"

"Well, some 'does, and some doesn't. When the woman be like to be worse afore she be better, some on 'em goes to church; but it don't make no differ, so far as I can see."

"But if they go to church, Mr. Tyler, I don't see the use of handfasting."

“Don’t ’ee? I’ll just tell ’ee, then. There was Margery Shaw, now; her folk wouldn’t let her marry Coggan—him as keeps the inn, thou knowest—didn’t think him good enou’; but, there, I said I wouldn’t name no names, an’ I’ve done it. Margery were well-nigh broken by it. Well, Coggan he brought her afore me, and they handfasted. I’ time it all came out, and old Shaw an’ his wife they were willing enou’, I promise thee, to send ’em to church. Nobody knowed about it but me; but I be mayor, and that were sufficient. I were quite enough to save Margery’s name, an’ right happy those folks have been. If it hadn’t ha’ been for handfasting, Margery would ha’ been a lone maid, and Coggan ’a gone to the God-forgive-me, he wor always that way inclined. That’s the use handfasting’s of.”

“I see,” said Elsie thoughtfully.

Here the conversation was perforce con-

cluded, for Mrs. Tyler 'came in, bent on airing to Elsie her private theory on the respective merits of chintz and dimity as bed-hangings.

Tyler betook himself to his forge, and as he hammered he continued the remarkable series of chuckles in which, as we have mentioned, he had indulged on the previous night, and exhibited sundry other symptoms of smug satisfaction. He was on the best of terms with himself, and he crooned as he worked, and he thought as he crooned that soon he should sing the song of the freeholder, and a sweeter ditty he could not conceive.

CHAPTER IV.

LAWFUL, BUT NOT LEGITIMATE.

As the days lengthened through the dreary months of February and March and the sun gained power over the quickening vegetation of the earth, so the radiated sensuousness of Arthur's nature was almost imperceptibly, but none the less surely, working its effects upon the warm affection in Elsie's disposition.

To him it was a mere pleasurable incident of his stay at Winterbourne ; to her it was the very crisis of destiny.

Day by day they met, at first without disguise, and then with the added romance

of delicious secrecy. And day by day the pretty girl ripened and expanded into the beautiful woman. The peach-bloom on her cheek was more vivid than of old ; she took tone and colour from the hours of her glamour. In the rarefied air of fairyland, her step attained an elasticity and her dainty form a sweet voluptuousness which it had hitherto lacked ; she had learned the abandon of love ; the fountains of the great deep of her woman's heart had broken up, and on the swift-rolling current her soul danced with brilliant and dangerous joy.

Arthur and Elsie had determined to hand-fast. Little by little he had succeeded in persuading her that this was the only course open to them—the only course practicable for him, for his safety ; and for her, honourable.

Very slowly, and with many misgivings, had Elsie succeeded, if not in convincing herself, at least in silencing the monitions of

her conscience. She quite believed that, as Arthur had told her, his liberty, if not his life, depended upon his continuing to live in strict retirement, and accepted, in the credulity of unquestioning ignorance, his statement that the rank he held necessitated his marriage being rigidly kept a secret for the present, which could not be if they were united in the accustomed manner. For the same reason she had gradually taught herself to believe that it would be dangerous to Arthur to tell her parents of their intended union ; and to her silly romanticism it seemed a more magnificent idea to be " my lady " in secret than to be plain " madame " to all the world.

That Arthur might be playing her false never for a moment suggested itself, even as a remote possibility. Elsie was simply an unsophisticated, trustful country maiden, more ignorant of the world, of its ways

and its wickedness, than the majority of Wessex lasses.

* * * *

Richard Tyler was at work in his forge alone. It was a bitter thought to him that the mayor of the borough, and Alderman of the Guild Merchant of Winterbourne, had not a journeyman, not even an apprentice, to help him. At times he cursed the eager haste to grow rich which made him the prey of every charlatan who professed to have the secret of the philosopher's stone. His was a mind to which in these latter days every specious prospectus would appear to herald a royal road to *El Dorado*, and its low cunning, which always accompanies a lack of wisdom, rendered him an easy dupe to every knave who could formulate a plausible scheme for the purpose of overreaching his neighbours.

Speculation in the "ebony trade" was the

South Sea Bubble of its day in the West country, and in his correspondence with the neighbouring seaport he had discovered, by what he deemed a lucky chance, the open mouth of the bottomless sieve into which he had carefully poured both his savings and his credit.

The kidnapping of “niggers” was not always a safe investment, as Mr. Tyler had found to his cost when the slaver of which he was part owner had been seized and destroyed by a French privateer.

But it may be questioned whether even this inhuman traffic was to be compared for despicable rascality with the precious trade in feminine deceit and corruption which his forge not infrequently witnessed ; and certainly he had surpassed himself in the line of conduct he had adopted towards the unsuspecting and innocent daughter of his sometime friend and companion, the saddler.

The sudden darkening of the doorway caused the mayor to raise his head from his work. The shade was cast by his lodger.

"Are you alone, my worthy mayor?" inquired the substance of the shadow.

"Aye. Has the time come, then?" asked the blacksmith, wiping the oozy sweat from his discoloured brow with the back of his wrist.

"It has, honest friend. Keep your fire up; you will want it shortly for the destruction of a certain interesting document, the existence of which I don't think you have forgotten."

"Be the lady ready?" inquired Tyler, with sardonic grimness. "May the devil take me, Master Crosby, but I'd gladly do this job for the mere love of it."

"I am quite prepared to believe it, Mr. Tyler. It is fortunate that your inclination should jump with my wishes in this matter,"

said Arthur sternly. "I can assure you that your personal likes and antipathies are a matter of absolute indifference to myself. What you do I pay you for, and there I choose our relations shall end. If these terms don't suit you, you have only to say so; I can find those in plenty who will do the work equally well, and, no doubt, much cheaper."

Tyler was a heavy-witted man, but he perceived from the strident tones and menacing manner of the speaker that discretion lay in silence. Arthur looked at him coldly for a moment, until he perceived that his words had taken the effect intended, and the hound was sufficiently cowed. Then without a word he turned on his heel and withdrew, to return a minute later, half-supporting and half-leading his trustful victim.

The blacksmith turned round as they entered, and assumed, as well as his crushed

condition permitted, the dignity of the magisterial office.

“ I, Richard Tyler, am mayor of this town of Winterbourne, and in right of my office chief magistrate of the borough. I demand of you, therefore, that if you know cause or impediment why you should not be handfasted in accordance with the ancient and honourable custom of the district, ye shall now declare it, or else for ever after hold your peace.”

Crosby averred that he knew of none, and Elsie muttered something in a shamefaced manner, which Tyler interpreted as having the same effect.

“ Take hold of each other’s hands,” said the mayor.

They did so.

“ Hast thee a ring, Master Crosby ? Thy signet ring will do. Elspeth would rather that than the iron ring they most uses. Give it me.”

When Crosby had obeyed, the mayor turned to Elsie.

“You say this after me: I, Elspeth Steele, take thee, Arthur Crosby, to be my handfast for a year and a day, and I will hold truly to thee for that time, and if we shall so agree, will continue thy faithful handfast until my life’s end.”

When Elsie had finished repeating this pompous and empty formula, the mayor required Crosby to make a similar declaration, which he did with an ill-concealed smile of contempt.

Then Tyler handed the ring to Arthur, and bade him put it on Elsie’s finger. And now the mayor, straightening himself, and assuming the portentous voice and inflated manner with which he was wont to address recalcitrant apprentices and widows who in their temerity dared to claim borough-rights, added: “I, Richard Tyler, by the grace

of God and the favour of his Sovereign Majesty King George, whose representative I am, Mayor of Winterbourne, and Alderman and Governor of the Guild Merchant, do pronounce thee, Elspeth, and thee, Arthur Crosby, handfasted, to dwell together as man and wife according to ancient custom."

"Is this all?" queried Arthur, in evident disgust at the rigmarole.

"Yes, Master Crosby, 'tis done; you're handfasted as sure as ever a man were i' this world."

"Good; here are your wages." And Arthur tossed over to Tyler the acknowledgment of the money advanced. "Come, Elsie dear, we're man and wife, or what comes to the same thing."

"Wait a bit, Master Crosby; what's your hurry? Madam here has got no lines."

"Confound it, man, what do you mean?"

"Must have her lines, Master Crosby ; no maid i' these parts reckons herself married like without her lines. 'Twon't take a minute ; I keeps a lot a-written out ready."

Arthur was about to turn savagely upon Tyler, and tell him to have done fooling, but a glance at Elsie's face restrained him. He saw that the girl's emotions were strung to their highest tension, and that a false step now would imperil all he had done. So he waited, with sorry grace, while the blacksmith produced a legal-looking document, and, strange though it may appear, his conscience smote him a little--just a very little--as he watched the deluded girl nervously sign her name, but not sufficiently to prevent him completing the miserable farce by the addition of his signature, and watching Tyler as that pure-minded philanthropist witnessed the same.

"May I keep this ?" asked Elsie timidly.

“Better not, mistress ; you’ll be dropping it, or leaving it about, mayhap. I’ll keep it for ’ee ; I mostly do keep ’em.”

“Yes, Elsie, dear, better let Tyler keep it ; it will be safer with him.”

Then they turned and left the forge. Tyler waited till they were well out of hearing, and then broke into a wild and savage laugh of suppressed exultation. Holding the paper Arthur had given him in payment at arm’s length, he careered round and round the forge, his countenance working convulsively with all contending evil emotions ; the big vein in his forehead stood out as if it would burst, and ever and again a horrible chuckle of malicious delight broke through his teeth. At length he ceased his weird dance, and, stooping over the forge, watched it with glittering eyes and parted lips as he blew it into a sullen and hungry blaze. With trembling hand he

held the paper a moment towards the lateral tongues of devouring heat, to which he seemed insensible, and which lent a ghastly hue to his distorted features ; then, as the paper fell from his fingers, he seized a piece of iron, and thrust it down into the heart of the glowing mass. It was consumed instantly, but still he thrust the iron down, and down again, and yet again, as he hissed, “ I thank thee, neighbour Steele, for helping an old friend out o’ his troubles ! I thank thee for having a daughter ! I thank the merciful Providence that made thy wife fruitful ! A good day’s work, my masters ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ” He laughed and cried like a maniac in hysterics, as with trembling fingers he took off his leathern apron and attempted to hang it up, but he shook like one smitten with palsy, and it fell on the floor. “ No more work to-day, Tyler ; no more work to-day. ’Tis a good day’s work. And now to

hold up thy head amongst thy fellows. Yes, I'll be off to the 'Red Lion' and take a sup to drink the health o' neighbour Steele an' his buxom daughter."

The afternoon was still young when Tyler arrived in great spirits at the "Red Lion." The thrifty townfolk were still at work; so, till shops were closed, and suppers eaten, and prayers said, Tyler sat and drank alone, save for such company as could spare the time to share his debauch for the passing moment.

But not in silence did the mayor sit; whether alone or in company, he chuckled, and gibbered, and muttered in unholy glee. Those who saw him thought he was drunk unusually early in the day, until convinced of his sobriety by his emphatic and vehement refusal to let any pay but himself.

At length, when the shutters were closed and the rushlights lit, the burghers came trooping in to form their nightly club.

Tyler's unwonted hospitality was the subject of much silent speculation, particularly when coupled with his abstracted manner and evident self-absorption. These were maintained until the entrance of Steele, which seemed to exert a strange influence upon the man, for on the instant his tongue was loosed, and he talked with reckless volubility.

When his nightly potion of cider was placed before him, the saddler put his hand into his pocket for the money.

"I pays here," cried Tyler, starting up.

"Nay, nay, Tyler ; what I has I pays for, meaning no offence. 'Tis my custom, as thou knowest."

"Please thysen, Steele, please thysen. If thou wonner drink wi' me, thou canst not prevent my drinking to 'ee. Friends, I give you neighbour Steele's health, and all o' his'n. I drinks to 'ee, Steele. Thou hast done me

a good turn this day. I feel my thanksgiving, neighbours, to my friend Steele."

The saddler stared at Tyler for a few seconds in open-eyed astonishment; then, mentally deciding that the mayor was too drunk to be responsible for his words, he merely nodded his acknowledgments, and drank down his cider in silence.

But Tyler was not to be put off by this rebuff; he insisted upon Steele's cup being replenished at his expense, and, to avoid a scene with a drunken man, the saddler consented.

During all this time Tyler had been throwing out hints as to his great obligations to his neighbour, which succeeded at last in thoroughly mystifying that worthy, who at length rose, and, with an abrupt "good-night," left the inn, conscious of an uneasy sense of misgiving. In the light of his recent quarrel with the mayor, he could not but feel that the ironical manner and

pretended gratitude of the drunken man somehow boded him no good.

When the saddler reached his home and was comfortably seated, with his slippers feet resting on the chimney settle, and his pipe of Virginia between his lips, he told his wife of Tyler's strange behaviour.

"I cannot understand it, wife ; I've done the man no good turn."

"Thou'st done him none ill, I'll warrant me," returned Mrs. Steele.

"True, wife, true ; I've done no ill, as I knows on, to him or any man. I cannot think what he meant."

"Take no count of it, Steele, the man were drunk ; Tyler be taking to bad ways. Lord ha' mercy on his wife and children."

"Yes, wife, thou wert right ; Tyler be taking to bad ways. But he were none so drunk but he knew what he were saying. I wish I could understand what he meant.'

CHAPTER V.

THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING.

THOMAS JAMES, third Earl of Grassthorpe, Viscount Fallowfield in the peerage of Ireland, and Baron Crosby, departed this life on the 22nd day of May, 1750.

A long account of his life and virtues may be read by the curious in the Oxford *Athenian*, an account which reflects greater credit on the writer's imagination than his veracity, together with full particulars of the pedigree and record of his successor, Sir Arthur Crosby, third baronet, at this time resident at Winterbourne.

The late Earl (s. p.) had married his

second cousin, and consequently the son of her only brother, in default of nearer issue of the blood of the founder, succeeded to the title and such estates, less the widow's dowry, as his respected uncle had not succeeded in muddling away.

This sad demise, which flung many of the noblest families in the land into deep affliction (*vide* the periodical aforesaid), was quite unforeseen. It is true that the noble earl had been out of health, but not to such a degree as to give ground for apprehension, either to his widow or the family apothecary, had the patient taken the most ordinary care.

Unluckily, at this time a rumour reached the ears of his lordship that the King was dissatisfied with his then advisers, and nothing would dissuade his lordship from at once proceeding to pay his respects to a certain very exalted personage. The rumour, it is true, turned out to be un-

founded, but the noble earl was so hospitably entertained that a chill, imprudently contracted immediately upon an extra long sitting at the table of his host, resulted in a fever, in order to relieve which the apothecary considerably bled him to death.

The whole business was so sudden that no one remembered to acquaint Arthur with his uncle's illness until after that peer's decease, and consequently the messenger who was dispatched to Winterbourne with the sad tidings bore with him at the same time the consolatory information that their recipient had become a cousin of his King.

The latest accession to the ranks of the King's counsellors bore the evil tidings with exemplary fortitude. The relations between the two had, for their position, been particularly cordial. The uncle had tolerated Arthur because he was his heir, and Arthur, for his part, respected his uncle as the foun-

tain and source of his coming honours. It will thus be seen that the ties which existed between them were rather those of clanship than of affection ; and, indeed, both were conscious that each would give the other away if by so doing he could advance his own interests one degree. Consequently, no one will be surprised to hear that when Arthur received the distressing intelligence, he consoled himself by remarking, " Poor old devil ! What a mercy he did not live three months longer, or he would have pocketed the money for all that timber he has been clearing in the park, and I shall want every penny of it to set me on my legs as Earl of Grassthorpe."

One thing was perfectly clear to his lordship, he must leave Winterbourne at once. It would be most inconvenient for His Majesty that one of his counsellors should be buried in so obscure and inaccessible a hole.

Arthur's was one of those protean natures which find no difficulty in adapting themselves to any agreeable set of circumstances. So it was not wonderful that he should find the whole of his more recent life, with its tender relations, falling away from him, as forming no part of his personality.

He therefore concluded in the most natural manner that it would be superfluous, as well as eminently disagreeable, were he to acquaint Elsie with the great change which had taken place in his fortunes. So he merely informed her when they met that night that he had been unexpectedly called to London, and that he should have to hold himself in readiness to obey the summons at any moment.

Elsie's first thought was that his safety was imperilled, and obscurely imagined that somehow their relationship had had something to do with the danger which she

apprehended menaced him. Arthur tenderly reassured her, hinting that perhaps his projected visit might mean emancipation from the thralldom of obscurity.

Upon the subject of the probable length of his absence he was so vague as to fill the poor girl with uneasiness, almost terror. She had been full of unquiet and nervous restlessness for some days past, and vague forebodings of indefinable coming ill had made her low-spirited.

Now Arthur was tiring of Elsie, and he took no pains to disguise the fact from himself. Of the life he had been living at Winterbourne he had long been heartily sick, and now that the opportunity of escape presented itself he was filled with the joy of a liberated prisoner. His gladness made him feel kindly towards the girl, whose only fault had been her fondness ; but the game had fallen, and its wounded placidity bored him.

So he was devoutly thankful when the time came for them to part for the night.

Elsie had been minutely curious, and the conversation which had ensued between them had been especially trying to Arthur in consequence. While he had seemed permanently fixed at Winterbourne, the girl had been content with her anomalous position. That circumstances forbade her living openly with Crosby had not troubled her, so long as she could see him constantly. She was satisfied, with the satisfaction of a little soft kitten before the fire that wakes to purr and sleep again. She was happy in her home life, and would have been content never to leave it so long as Arthur was near. But now that he was going away, her home would feel empty, and she lonesome; the better part of her life would be taken from her, and the home which had been, for the sweet months of the near past, a sufficient

and pleasant shelter, must now become her sole resource ; she must gather up again the frayed threads of her maiden life and find in them, and anticipations of her lord's return, her only available satisfaction. The wifely instinct was strong within her, and she plied Arthur with the thousand and one trivial questions of affection. She was full of anxiety as to how they should live, how long it would be ere they could openly avow their relationship. She drew a pretty little picture of the time when they should go, and, standing hand in hand in the saddler's kitchen, tell her father and mother that Arthur and she were man and wife.

This would have afforded Arthur the opportunity he might have embraced of acquainting the girl with the real nature of their relationship, but he had a conscientious and deeply-rooted objection, as moral cowards usually have, to painful scenes. So

he contented himself with vaguely murmuring that he must consider whether that would be the wisest course to take.

Whilst Elsie was content to allow the precise date of his return to remain undecided, she was tenderly solicitous to know the longest time during which they must be parted ; and her heart sank with visible disappointment when Arthur professed himself unable to say, even approximately. So he clumsily changed the subject, Elsie looked so woebegone, and, as there was nothing to be gained by it, he could not bring himself to inflict useless suffering.

Then the girl was desirous to know how they should pass their after life. Should she be a great lady ; must she go to Court ; how should she be capable of managing a great house, and a crowd of unruly servants ; would not her husband be ashamed of his countrified wife, who would of necessity ill

compare with the town ladies to whom he was accustomed ?

These, and a multitude of other questions, Elsie asked, all showing an earnest longing for some word of comfort, for the petting and reassuring that a new-made wife has a right to expect from her husband under such circumstances, and at such a time, at least.

But Arthur was not to be drawn into a genuine and responsive tenderness. He was courteous and considerate even to politeness, and managed thereby to cause his poor little partner even more pain than if he had harshly refused to listen to her innocent chatter ; for when, in the long hours of the night, she came to reflect on what he had said and promised, she found all a vague nothingness.

And Arthur had left Elsie with a light "Good-night," lightly spoken, and had barely turned his head to watch her as she

went. But the little form had gone heavily from him, down the hill and across the mill-stream, till it was hidden by the windings of the street that runs from the Friary Gate across the Minster Yard to the market-place where lay her home, wearily and with a swaying uncertainty.

Arthur Crosby, left to his own meditations, evidently found them pleasant, for he sang blithely and with lightness of heart as he walked. He had quickly dismissed Elsie from his thoughts, and, after brief deliberation, turned his steps in the direction of the "Red Lion," where he spent a convivial hour or two, much to the delight of the toppers, for he treated them with a generosity as rare in their experience as the visit of any other angel. Yet to none of them, not even to Steele, not even to his landlord, did he mention his intended departure.

At length he betook himself to his lodgings, and, shutting himself in his rooms,

spent the rest of the evening in selecting such of his belongings as his valise and saddle-bags would hold. This was not a difficult task as his personal effects were few. Just as he had finished packing his valise, he discovered that he had left out some playing-cards and a few pairs of lace ruffles. What was to be done? The thing would clearly hold no more, so he hastily pulled out what offered first, which happened to be a little bundle of notes written at different times by Elsie, and a purse on which she had embroidered his initials in her hair. After debating for a moment in his mind, he carelessly tossed these into the fire, and put the cards and ruffles into their place.

Then he went to bed, and slept calmly until the early morning sun, glancing in at his lattice, awoke him to the consciousness that he was—Earl of Grassthorpe, cousin and counsellor of the King.

CHAPTER VI.

“THUS CONSCIENCE——”

THE jennet on which Elsie had taken her memorable ride to Warehampton Canonorum bore our hero from Winterbourne to Lyndhurst, where, by dint of starting early, he arrived about the middle of the day.

Thinking it a pity to disturb the even tenour of, or introduce unnecessary excitement into, the life of Winterbourne, he had considerably refrained from mentioning that he had no intention of returning, and had left the Tylers, in common with the rest of the people, under the impression that he was merely about paying an indefinite visit

to London, so there had been no leave-taking.

Indeed, so anxious was he to avoid the least appearance of ostentation that he even omitted to trouble his landlord for his bill, concluding that that worthy, having already made a considerable sum out of him, and, not being a newly-succeeded peer, could not possibly be so much in need of ready money as he was himself.

Arthur's enforced seclusion and rest at Winterbourne had set him up physically with such a stock of lusty health, and rude, downright robustness as he had probably never known before ; the healthful air from over the downs which lay round the town had made him a new man. He had left off drinking wine to any extent, and the quiet life and enforced early hours had done their work, so that, having forsworn sack and lived cleanly, he felt himself in perfect con-

dition for the enjoyment of the only life of which he was capable.

At Lyndhurst he found, as he more than suspected—for gentlemen travelling in those days were well used to such incidents—that no postchaise was procurable, and therefore he must rest his jennet for the night (for the merciful man is merciful to his beast), and take his chance of procuring such a conveyance at Winchester.

And indeed Arthur was nothing loth to seize any opportunity which afforded an excuse for prolonging his journey. He had no taste for gruesome experiences, and sincerely hoped that fortune would so far favour him as to prevent his arrival at Grassthorpe in time to be chief mourner.

Keeping this laudable object steadily in view, he made shift to spend an agreeable, and even remunerative, night at Lyndhurst, as a cocking match was being held, and as

Arthur was a keen sportsman he managed to combine business with pleasure by putting his money on the right birds.

The next day he rode quietly on to Winchester, where he arrived early in the afternoon, and put up at the principal posting house. Finding some difficulty in securing accommodation—for, it being assize time, the inn was full—he threw off all disguise, and announced himself, as carelessly as so tremendous a statement would permit, the Earl of Grassthorpe. Not a little to his chagrin the announcement was received by the stolid host with evident incredulity. To him it was simply inconceivable that a peer should travel without retinue, or the semblance of state, and on a horse which, though wonderful to Winterbourne eyes, was certainly none of the best.

Of course, his lordship would have left the inn at once in high dudgeon, but there was

nowhere else to go, so he put up with the slight to his dignity, and, pocketing his wrath, inquired who were attending the assize? tolerably certain that among the county notabilities he should find some one to stand sponsor for his claims.

The first name the landlord mentioned was that of the Honourable Thomas Neville, a sometime friend and boon companion of Arthur's, who, he was informed, was stopping at the house, and was at present busily engaged in sleeping off the effects of his overnight debauch.

Fortunately for Arthur Crosby, Mr. Neville's valet recognized our hero, and informed the landlord that his guest's statement was perfectly true, the information having reached the Honourable Thomas *per* his London newsletter, and that gentleman having in a lucid interval on the previous evening toasted the newly-suc-

ceeded peer in the hearing of his valet. Hereupon the landlord, with no special grace—as why should he to a peer who travelled without servants or equipage, and who could give no reference to any member of the clergy of the town, not even to a curate?—undertook to find him an apartment, and even thought it probable that he might be able to procure Arthur the desired postchaise by the following day.

Mr. Neville's valet, in whose eyes the peers of the realm were of greater, and the clergy of less, importance, undertook to get Arthur a couple of servants in the course of the afternoon, and was otherwise so obsequiously obliging that Arthur, whose spirits had been considerably damped by the attitude of the landlord, felt himself reviving in his own esteem.

Although the action was considered derogatory, he waited on the tailor with

regard to mourning, instead of ordering that tradesman to attend him at his inn ; and, this vitally important matter concluded, wandered into the town in search of such diversion as it might afford.

To a gentleman of our hero's unecce-siastical turn of mind, Winchester was not an exhilarating town, although he felt a little piqued amusement at the crass stupidity of the blockheads who would stand aside and bow to every chuff who wore bands and a thread-bare cassock, and at the same time dispute the wall with an hereditary law-giver.

After an hour or so of aimless wandering he thought he would return by the way of the High Street to his hostelry, and see whether his friend Mr. Neville was stirring. For the second time that day fortune favoured him, for he had scarcely entered the High Street when he was startled by

a sounding thwack across the shoulders, and a hearty—

“God bless you, Crosby—I mean Grass-thorpe! How do you do? My fellow told me you were in the town, so I came in search of you. Fore gad! I am monstrous glad to see you, and to congratulate you on your luck. Going to the funeral of the old gentleman, I suppose? ’Pon my soul, Crosby, you are the luckiest devil I know. The idea of having a father and an uncle die within a twelvemonth! Gad’s life! what considerate relations! Wish all my brothers would die; no such luck for me!”

Arthur was unfeignedly glad to see his friend. He had not, perhaps, the highest opinion of Mr. Neville’s intelligence or attainments; still it was the first breath of the coming adulation, and it refreshed him. So he returned the salutation in the same spirit.

“What are you going to do with yourself to-day?” asked the Honourable Tom, after a few commonplaces. “Better come down to the Court House. My father is High Sheriff, you know, and he told me there was sure to be some good things coming on to-day. Cursed hard lines that I’ve got to attend him to-day, ain’t it. Chichester races are on.”

Arthur did not anticipate very much amusement from attending the Court House; but, at worst, it would be a diversion and a refuge from *ennui*, so he followed Mr. Neville down the street and up the steps to the hall where the assizes were held.

The room was crowded, as assize courts in towns where the inhabitants have little to interest them always are, but room was made for Arthur and his friend to get to the bar. Mr. Neville’s father, Lord Hockslade,

was seated on the dais beside the judge, and was looking excessively bored. Four people had already been condemned to death that day, and he was, naturally enough, beginning to find the thing monotonous. Consequently he was rejoiced to see Arthur, and, sending the usher for him, managed to gain a few minutes' relief by introducing him to the judge, who, in deference to his rank, invited our hero to take a seat on the bench next himself.

This public recognition of his social status was grateful to Arthur's nature, and it was with a touch of condescension that he asked the judge to tell him what was the matter in hand. It was only an uninteresting case of petty theft from the butchery. The prisoner was a tall, gaunt man of haggard and hungry aspect, who had been more mindful of the claims of his starving offspring than of the rights of property.

It was such a commonplace case that his condemnation to the gallows elicited no sympathy and excited no interest. No one in the Court seemed to conceive that five lives saved was of more importance than the ownership of a piece of dead meat ; and had any one in the assembly been asked for an opinion as to the justice or adequacy of the sentence they would have replied, "Serves him right for a thieving rascal," which is merely an illustration of the modern callousness, which can regard with equanimity the sentence of a ruffian who has beaten a woman almost to death to a week's imprisonment, and that of a small boy to a month for stealing a turnip.

The next case was one of quite different character. A girl who looked barely twenty, but pale and wan from the foul air and want of proper food she had experienced in prison, was placed in the dock

charged with the murder of her illegitimate child.

It was a sad story, not by any means a novel one. A man, above her in rank, had promised her marriage, and left her. Driven to desperation, she had taken the baby's life, though, by what would appear cruel mercy, she had been prevented from taking her own, so that she might be killed by the law in decorous fashion.

The artless and child-like beauty of the girl's sad face touched Arthur nearly, and he felt himself aggrieved at the Hon. Tom for having brought him to witness so disagreeable a spectacle.

Of course it was not really so, yet for the life of him Arthur could not dissociate in his mind the dumbstricken form in the dock from Elsie Steele.

It was only a short trial. The girl had no defence to offer; she could only plead that

she had been deceived. She was penniless, and the baby had cried and cried in its hunger until she could bear its cry no longer, so she had unclasped the tiny fingers from about her neck, and had put it from her, to die. Then she had flung herself into a pond, but ere she could find the peace she had sought some officious hand had dragged her thence, to the place of “justice”; and at this reflection she wept, for the first and only time during the trial.

With tearless eyes she listened, as the judge, with evident reluctance, summed up by pointing out, very properly, that all this was no defence, and the jury, having no alternative, found her guilty.

With tearless eyes she watched the judge as he took up the black cap, and turning to Arthur and Lord Hockslade, where they sat, remarked in low, grave tones, “This is a sad miscarriage of justice, my lords. The

girl is guilty; I have no choice but to condemn her to death; yet surely it is the scoundrel who seduced her who should be standing in the dock. I pray you, my lords of Parliament, to get so cruel a law altered with what haste you can."

Then with a brevity which under the circumstances was the acme of mercy he assumed the black cap, and sentenced the girl to be hanged by the neck until she was dead.

Arthur had witnessed enough of the administration of justice for one day, so with a bow to the judge he stepped down from his place on the bench and passed from the hall, and as he went he gasped like one who is choking for want of air.

The cases had lasted so long that it was now evening, and when Arthur came out into the gathering darkness he felt confused and dazed. He was in no mood to return to

the inn and the society of the Honourable Thomas Neville, and the choice spirits by which it was that gentleman's invariable fortune to be surrounded.

The air was cold ; he was chill and hungry. Hard by stood a booth wherein was sold hot furmity to the people who attended the assize. It was not the sort of place Crosby would have entered while at Winterbourne, but his recent experience made him for the nonce indifferent to his surroundings. He ordered a plateful of the delicacy, and though he endeavoured to cool it by repeated lacings of usquebaugh, it was some minutes before it was fit to swallow, and meanwhile he was compelled to listen to the conversation about him.

The occupants of the tent were nearly all working folks ; labourers, yeomen, farmers, small tradesmen and craftsmen. Their conversation was all of the poor girl

whose trial most of them had just witnessed.

“Ay, poor heart,” said one motherly-looking woman, “’twas clear the good judge wanted she to go free, he knew no better, yet ’twould have been bad for she. ’Tis better to choke right out for five minutes than be half-choked wi’ shame all your life.’

“’Tis true, woman, ’tis true,” chimed in an old man who was standing by; “’tis better she should die and tend to the babe which is yet too young to be left; the dear Lord is merciful, and I makes no doubt they’ll be together. You see, neighbour, ’twere wrong in she, I don’t deny it, but, there, she be not the one most to blame, and I feel it in my vitals that ’tis unnatural she should burn for everlastin’ on account on it; no worse can happen to the chap as ruined her.”

“Ay, an he goes free so long as he keeps away from her folk; things be mortal un-

equal, surely,” said a heavy-jowled man with dull eyes, who had appeared too interested in his furmity to pay any heed to the conversation.

“May be so, may be not,” rejoined the old man again ; “’twill be worse for him, I take it, when he knows of the girl’s end. Living will be hard work for such a rascal. Let ’un bide, neighbours, let ’un bide and punish hissels.”

“Ay, true, but I’d gladly punish him myself as well ; not that I’d spare him one squirm of the torture he’ll get in hell, ’tis sure——” commenced the woman.

But Arthur did not stop to hear the finish. Leaving his mess untouched he flung down half-a-crown and went out. The company of the Hon. Tom Neville and his friends was preferable to this, so he betook himself to the inn, where he found his friend and half-a-dozen other choice spirits who had just

returned from the Court House, and by whom he was received with an ovation.

The Hon. Thomas then announced that as his father had to entertain the judge at dinner he was resolved with the aid of his friends, to spend the evening in a philosophic, not to say devout, manner ; and by way of improving the time to the full, commenced proceedings by ordering up about half the wine the cellars of the inn contained, and then demanded from a friend who, more blessed by heaven than himself, had spent the day on Chichester race-course, an account of the day's sport.

After this momentous topic had been discussed with the fulness and gravity which its importance demanded, cards were called for and play continued until about eleven o'clock, by which time most of the company were incapable of distinguishing the colour much less the value of the cards they held.

Under these circumstances it was obviously necessary that play should be suspended until such time as the gentlemen should have succeeded in drinking themselves sober, a sort of half-way house between their original state and that condition which landed them all under the table, a consummation which the landlord had considerably anticipated and turned to his profit by letting their rooms over again to guests who were less convivially inclined.

At a certain stage in the proceedings it was Mr. Neville's invariable characteristic to become severely moral, and, having been considerably impressed by his enforced attendance at the heels of justice during the day, he descanted in a maudlin and bibulous fashion, and at a length which compensated for its want of perspicuity, upon the sad moral condition of the country at large.

“What would you do, ole f'ler?” he asked

of Arthur, abruptly, in the midst of a discussion upon the heinous crime of trespass.

"I do not know," said Arthur, whose estates having been always left to an agent had never caused him to bestow a moment's consideration upon them.

"I know ; I'd a horse—hic !—whipped him to death," replied Mr. Neville.

"Rather too severe a punishment for walking over somebody else's land, would it not be ?" queried Arthur.

"Walking over the people's landsh," said the Hon. Thomas, who had by this time completely forgotten his former part in the conversation, "who minds any one walking over landsh ? Any fellersh may walk over my landsh and welcome." The generosity of which sentiment was emphasized by the fact that Mr. Neville had not a single acre of land. "No, the fellersh (hic) who deserted girl, I mean ; you know, Crosby, I

mean Grashby, the f'ler who had the baby and drowned the girl, you know wash I mean.”

Arthur could make no reply to this drunken reminder, so vaguely professed his ignorance of the whole matter.

But the pertinacious Mr. Neville was not to be so put off, and insisted upon a direct opinion from Arthur on the man's conduct in deserting the girl.

“Would you have drowns the deserted (hic) baby? I mean would you have deserted the drowned baby that (hic) had the girl? No, I mean, do you know, Crossthorpe, I mean : does any gentleman (hic) know wash I mean?”

“Of course not,” replied Arthur sententiously, whereupon there was a roar of laughter.

“Coursh not, nor any other drowned (hic) baby. I'd a' married (hic) twenty on 'em myself. Wouldn't you, Croshby?”

But that gentleman had had enough of this idiotic drivel, so hastily rising from the table, he left the room and the inn, seeking in the darkness without some respite from the ever recurring subject of the trial.

He took a turning on the left through one of the narrow bye-ways, a remnant of the time when Winchester was a walled city. Walking rapidly, he plunged deeper and deeper into the tortuous obscurity. Suddenly he came out upon a broad thoroughfare, and looking up, beheld within a few paces the white steps of the Court House. Hastily turning, he re-entered the labyrinth of narrow streets behind St. John's Hospital from which he had emerged, quickening his pace as though he were pursued, only to find himself in a few minutes face to face with the gloomy walls of the old prison.

Was it fancy, or did he really hear the sound of moaning? Of course it was fancy,

only the wind moaning through the hollow courts and empty arches had seemed like the sound of a human cry to his over-wrought fancy.

Was he never to get away from the haunting thought of the poor girl whom he had seen in the dock a few hours before? Pshaw! what was it to him? Nothing. Nothing?—It was a lie.

Where was Elsie? What was she doing? He chid himself for his childishness. What had this girl to do with Elsie? Why should he trouble himself about either of them?

But that fellow ought to have married the girl. Well, was that any reason why he should marry Elsie. The idea was absurd; he, a peer; she, the daughter of a saddler, who reeked of leather and oil, a mere trading yokel. No, he would allowance her, as liberally as he might. Surely it was honour

enough for her to have been the mistress of a nobleman.

And so communing with his vanity he came again into an open space, and yet again found himself in front of the Court House.

With a curse on his lips he crossed the High Street and took his way through a narrow lane. Overhead the houses nearly met, nothing but a thin strip of sky, across which hurried broken masses of fleecy cloud met his view as he looked up.

At length he reached the close. Before him towered, in sombre majesty, the gigantic Norman church, indistinctly outlined by a waning moon. To Crosby it stood like a solemn tribunal in stone, stern, silent, judicial. The carven figures of saint and apostle on the front seemed each sitting in judgment upon him, stoney-eyed monitors, from whom he must expect only justice. His thoughts

were no longer his own. In the presence of this solemn majesty he was afraid.

At length, recovering himself by a positive effort, he entered the avenue, and took the path which skirts the bare south aisle of the nave, and stood in the square of the long-destroyed cloisters.

The deep-toned bell chimed far above him. The thin vibrant echo, which revealed its age, smote upon his heart with an uncomfortable sense that here he was known in his shallowness, known as all the generations of men had been, and the bell derided him. All around the prebendal houses looked down at him ; they were the homes of men of religion, peaceful and clean-living men, and he realised that, peer though he was, the humblest of those who ministered at yonder altar would have shuddered at his contact had they known him as he felt the old bell knew him in his heartless vanity.

He dared not stay longer. In an ancient legend we hear that once for the awful prize, a human soul, the devil himself was tempted into a church. In his hurry to leave a place so distasteful his thumb was caught in the lock, and sooner than wait to withdraw it he tore himself away, leaving his thumb behind him. So Arthur felt that he must not stay longer amid these hallowed surroundings, for if he did he might have that torn from him which he held dearer than all else. Like a true sensualist he gloated upon his baseness, and hugged closer the cancer of lust that was eating into his soul. He was a leper, proud of his leprosy !

As he reached the slype, which runs beneath the wall of the ancient transept, in the intense darkness he stumbled over something, and, recovering himself, knew from the groan which the something emitted that it was a man.

“What drunken hound have we here?” he exclaimed. “Strike me ugly, a gentleman cannot walk through this cursed town in peace. I’ll teach you to sleep off your drunkenness where gentlemen may fall over you, you sot!”

“Teach me, ay, you shall teach me by stripes and pain,” and the figure rose from the stones on which it had lain prostrate, and seizing Arthur, hurried him to the open space by the side of the sanctuary. The moonlight showed our hero that his companion was a man aged, haggard and unkempt, with wild and cavernous eyes.

“Let me alone. Go back to your stones again,” said Arthur; “if you prefer this mouldy dampness you are welcome to it for aught I care.”

“Nay,” said the fanatic, clinging to him with one hand as with the other he tore off his own clothes, leaving his shoulders bare,

“you said you would teach me, and you shall. I will bare my back to the smiter, nay, with a whip of small cords shalt thou chasten me. Yea, thou shalt chasten my body until, from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores ; peradventure the Lord may turn away his anger, and fulfil his wrath at the hand of his servant.”

“Not through me, my friend,” sneered Arthur. “I will get you conveyed to the mad-house with pleasure ; the keepers will whip their wrath away on your body, I warrant me.”

“Fool !” cried the fanatic, “as thou art I was ; as I am thou shalt never be, for the face of the Lord is turned away from thee, and thou shalt be cut off in thy sins.”

“Thanks,” said Arthur ; “this charming glimpse of the future is doubtless quite as ac-

curate as I should have obtained from a gipsy, and it has the merit of being a great deal cheaper. Pray go on, friend, I find your amiable conversation vastly entertaining.”

“Nay, then, I will remember the word of the Lord, nor seek to cast pearls before swine. Stay!—who am I that should call one of the least of his creatures common or unclean?”

“My friend, you would be wrong if you did. I may be unclean, but common I certainly am not. I would have you know, old gentleman, that you have the honour of addressing the Earl of——.”

“Silence, pitiful man! I have been greater than thou, poor fool; I have led—may the Lord pardon my sin of boasting! Nay, it is laid upon me to tell thee, not who who I was, but the wickedness I have done in the days of my flesh.”

“Oh, possibly you are the Grand Mogul,

I don't dispute it I assure you; I shall be monstrous glad to act father confessor to your high and mightiness. I am always pleased to receive information which may prove useful, and any little odd wrinkle in the paths of vice would prove acceptable, I am not proud, believe me."

Arthur found it extremely difficult to maintain his effrontery. Feeling secretly abashed under the stern gaze of this weird enthusiast, it was only by an effort of will that he succeeded in sustaining the levity of his deméanour.

"Listen, scoffer. By day I eat the bread of carefulness and drink the water of affliction, and by night I lie on the stones and wash them with my tears. Seven times a day do I discipline myself till the cords are stained with my blood, that by the pain of my body I may keep in remembrance the sin of my youth. Yea, I

am an outcast from the face of men lest I defile them !”

“Go on, old gentleman,” said Arthur encouragingly ; “I am dying with curiosity to know what your particular sin, as you call it, was. Strike me dumb if I am not. But don’t hurry, my time’s my own, I assure you ?”

“Yea,” continued the fanatic, ignoring the interruption, “I did ruin her whom I did love, and in her shame she died.”

“Is that all ?” asked Arthur, “well, you are in tolerably good company, my friend, but I had hoped for something much more *piquante*. By thunder, I am disappointed.”

“I ruined her life, I killed her body, I damned her soul ; the measure of mine iniquity is full. Yet for me is mercy reserved, while for her are the burnings of everlasting death. Oh God ! let me live that I may suffer ! Let my life be one great

agony, but let me live ; let sorrow and shame compass my goings, but let me live ; let me not die lest my sufferings should end ! ”

His uplifted hands fell to his sides, his upturned face sank forward down upon his breast ; swiftly he turned and vanished into the darkness, leaving Arthur wondering if he, Arthur Crosby, were awake, or should presently find himself rousing from a hideous nightmare.

At length, recovering himself somewhat, he said aloud, as if to gather courage from the sound of his own voice, “ Rather a curious sort of old gentlemen I’ve unearthed ; I hope the next person who stumbles over him may have the grace to thrash him to his heart’s content.”

Then he continued his walk, strangling his thoughts and keeping up his courage by whistling snatches of such songs as he

remembered to have been fashionable in his courtier days.

When he came upon the East end of the Lady chapel he involuntarily stopped to examine the picture of architectural loveliness towering in heavenward aspiration before him. Height above height rose the colossal pile of the Abbey, here, only a dim mass ; there, white and distinct as the moon shone from behind the racing rack. Houses of brick, dusk with age and sagged by storm filled in the misty foreground. He was standing where four paths met ; the necessities of human convenience had made them across the ancient precincts, but the ground they occupied had been consecrated once, and still was reckoned as belonging to the church.

Presently he became aware of a swinging light, close to the ground, approaching the cathedral. The sight aroused his curiosity,

and he stood watching it until he saw that it was making directly towards him. By this time he had discerned that the light was that of a lantern, carried by one of a party of about a dozen persons, some of whom bore on their shoulders what appeared a heavy burden. Arthur retreated into the dense shadow of an overhung doorway.

The little crowd came slowly on until it stopped a few yards from where he was standing. Then the bearers put down their burden, and some half-dozen men threw off their cloaks and began to dig on a little patch of sward which lay just off the road. Meanwhile the rest of the company stood about the burden, each wrapped in profound silence. Nothing but the soft thud of the spade and the fall of mellow earth broke the oppressive stillness; and Arthur from his retreat devoutly wished that his inquiring spirit had not prompted him to stop. He

was conscious of being calm with the calmness of intense excitement, and could not reason with himself to break the spell of enchantment which had fallen on him, by stirring a step or even changing his strained posture.

What was this that was going forward? Why should these people stand so silently under the driving night sky? If they must needs bury their dead, why choose this uncanny hour? Was he never to escape from the thralldom of this endless night? He was a fool ever to have come out; better to have stopped at the inn and got drunk like any other gentleman.

His reverie was abruptly ended by a startling cry, as of a woman in pain. The men had ceased their work and were standing round the grave, and as Arthur gazed upon the group he saw a woman fling herself wildly down beside the rude coffin,

and as she flung her arm across it, in the abandon of her grief she sobbed, " My child, my child, my own poor little girl, I must see your face again. I cannot, cannot believe you are dead. Pray kind neighbours open the lid of this box, that I may see my child's face once more."

An elderly man stooped down and tried to lift her gently from the earth, but she clung to the coffin so that the man must have used force to tear her from it. Then one of the men spoke in a low tone to another, and the two together wrenched the lid from its place.

The spell was broken. Arthur stepped quickly from his place of shelter not knowing what he did. A few strides and he stood beside the dead. Something, he could not tell what, compelled him to look down. His glance encountered the stony gaze of a dead woman's eyes.

“My God! ’tis the little girl of the trial!”

A big, motherly woman took him gently by the arm and led him away. He recognised her as the woman who had spoken in the booth, while he was waiting for his furmity to cool.

“’Twas kindly meant, but you did wrong to come here. A stranger has no right to pry on our dead.”

Then Arthur, knowing that the girl could not have died by the hand of the hangman, asked, “How did it happen?”

Briefly the woman told him all the tragic story. How, when the girl had been taken back to the prison, she had made shift to strangle herself, and had been found dead by the gaoler who had taken her some food that the narrator had brought.

“As the judge was in the place,” continued the woman, “the gaoler he went and told him, and the good man said, ‘give her

friends the body and tell them to bury it at once, I'll be your warrant ; there's been enough misery for them already, poor hearts, without more public shame.' So we took the body and now we are burying it. Lord rest her soul !”

“ Why here, and now ? ” asked Arthur.

“ Ay, poor thing, but the law calls her a murderess, and it would e'en call her a suicide on a crowner's 'quest. They would drive a stake through her and bury her at cross roads. No parson would dare to give the body room in his churchyard, so we are burying it ourselves in holy ground ; the dean will be content to let it bide when he knows, no fear.”

Arthur waited until the simple, solemn task was ended and the last of the little crowd had left, taking with them the broken-hearted mother. Still he waited, he knew not for what. He would go, it was all

nothing to him. What was it that a girl should be tried for child-murder? What was it that a crowd of ignorant boors should curse her seducer? Why should he care that a drunken helot like Neville should have declared that a gentleman would have married the girl? He knew well enough that a gentleman would have done no such thing. It was absurd! And what were the ravings of a mad fool like the man who had denounced him, that he, Arthur Crosby—Arthur Earl of Grassthorpe—should bestow a thought on them? What was the opinion of such as these to him, and why should the glassy stare of those lifeless eyes haunt him?

And a voice spoke quite close to him, "Because you are a seducer, and Elsie Steele is your victim. Because the fate of this poor girl lying at your feet may be her fate."

"No!" replied Arthur, to the bodiless

voice, "No, this girl had a child and Elsie——" Then a strong shudder shook his frame, and he broke into a cold sweat at the ghost of a suggestion which passed through his mind.

Then he spoke aloud.

"No! it is not true. It cannot be. And if it is I do not care. I will live my life, and go my way, and enjoy myself."

A low chuckling laugh smote upon his ear. He turned sharply round, but no visible person was anywhere by; yet he had heard the laugh.

He had, and knew not that it was the laugh which—as one has said—a man having once heard, he hears throughout duration, the laugh of his own soul at itself.

CHAPTER VII.

HE THAT KNOWETH TO SWIM CAN SAVE HIM-
SELF, OR ANOTHER.

THE morning on which Arthur left Winchester broke dull and grey; the humidity of growth was in the air, but it was hardly a pleasant day. His lordship found it a trifle tedious bowling along the quiet, ill-kept roads towards the sleepy village of Pangbourne, where he lay for the night. He was not pleasant company for himself, he would not think and he would not anticipate; an uncomfortable mood, which we have all experienced when we have deliberately decided against the judicial utterance of our better nature.

When Arthur rose next morning the prickings of compunction had ceased. It was a delightful day in early summer, full of gentle exhilaration and big with the promise of many long days of light. The hedge-rows that flitted past him were full of whispering confidences to the effect that they were all very glad to be alive, and the fields beyond offered a grateful incense which distilled sweetly upon the rare morning air, while the trees which lined the roadway lifted themselves like strong men in the sunlight of prosperity, casting all shadows to the earth. Overhead the light wind was busy with the fleecy clouds, puffing them to pieces like bits of wool blown hither and thither under the sky, which lay in dreamy distance with a suggestion of tender infinity. Not that Arthur was impressed in this fashion; to him it was simply a fine day, affording an agreeable stimulus to his senses, which

quicken'd his blood and made him hungry.

Some three hours quick riding by verdant hedge-row and quiet village brought the new Earl of Grassthorpe to the lodge gates of his ancestral seat. As the carriage approached the ancient archway which formed the entrance of the park the horses were checked, and Arthur, looking out, saw that he must wait until such time as the workmen should have finished nailing the escutcheon of the dead lord over the portal. So he dismounted to finish his journey on foot. The operation he had witnessed at the gate told him that the obsequies were over, and there was now no need for haste; for this Arthur was devoutly thankful, as death in any form was always distasteful to his fastidious and shallow mind. The violent death of his father had caused a greater shock to his sensibilities than he had cared

to own even to himself; it was horrible and repulsive, and Arthur resented his father dying in a fashion that disgusted him; it was a personal injury which the son never forgave.

Lady Grassthorpe was sitting in the room where we first made her acquaintance, surrounded by all the conventional trappings of pompous woe which propriety demanded of its votaries on the death of a great lord. The only other occupant of the dreary looking chamber, which successfully resisted every temptation of the beautiful morning to cheerfulness, was a prematurely aged man, tall, and of soldierly bearing. A singular lack of ostentation was observable in his dress, which was none the less proper to the occasion and which marked him as a man of sincerity. This was Colonel Kirton, a friend of the late Earl of Grassthorpe, under whom he had served with fidelity and distinction

in the wars with Marlborough, and between whom there had subsisted a friendship as strong as their natures were dissimilar. The late Earl was a trimmer and a time-server, weak of will, and, as a consequence, hypocritical; whilst Kirton was as single-minded and independent a gentleman as was to be found among his contemporaries, strong of will and pure in his every intent. Misfortune had bowed his head and sprinkled his hair with grey, but it had neither shrivelled his heart nor soured his nature.

He had journeyed from London to be present at the funeral of his old friend, and, that tribute paid, remained, with that unobtrusive courtesy which distinguished him, to advise and, so far as in him lay, to be of service to the widow; while other guests, overpowered by the dismal air of the mansion, had seized the earliest opportunity for taking their departure.

Lady Grassthorpe did not fail to appreciate the delicacy of his conduct. During her late husband's lifetime she had had many opportunities of learning to know and respect Colonel Kirton, whom she had come to regard as her best confidant and adviser-in-chief; indeed, almost in the light of a confessor. Without any interests of his own to engage his attention, this gentleman had become one of those benefactors of his species to whom every one instinctively turns for sympathy and strength.

The venerable lady was restless and irritable, and her bright eyes gleamed in the dim light of the room with ill-suppressed resentment at her nephew's inexcusable conduct in neglecting to be present at the funeral of his uncle.

"It is of no use, Kirton, say what you will. He ought to have been here; appearances should be respected."

“ It was probably only a question of time, Lady Grassthorpe.”

“ Fiddlesticks, sir! I made that chaplain of ours look out his journey in the road-book. He ought to have been here at noon yesterday; there was plenty of time. The truth is, Kirton, he is a Crosby, so you needn't waste your breath in making his behaviour look right when you know it is disgraceful.”

“ Indeed, my lady, I cannot conceive that your nephew would so far forget what is due to yourself and his rank as to wilfully neglect so important a matter.”

“ Kirton, you speak like a fool. Do you wish to persuade me that you don't know enough of Arthur to think he would move his little finger out of respect for any one or anything beyond his precious self? I tell you again, he's like the rest of the male Crosbys, a selfish, heartless——man. He

never gave promise of being anything better, so I don't know why I should profess myself disappointed in him. But it is hard, very hard, that I should have to step aside for such a jackanapes."

"Pshaw! Lady Grassthorpe, your nephew is a man of sufficient sensibility to show all fitting respect to the position your ladyship will in future be required to adorn."

"Gad's life, Kirton, you're only fit for Bedlam! You know as well as I that my nephew has no sensibility. You know he is thoroughly selfish, and is bound to go to the devil like the rest of the male Crosbys; and the sooner he goes the better for everybody, say I," added the old lady bitterly.

"Don't forget, Lady Grassthorpe, that my lord is but young."

"What's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh, Kirton; 'tis an old adage, but

sound. I hope I mayn't live to see the day when he'll be obliged to dis-park the land, and the bailiffs will be in the house."

"We must marry him, my lady; a good wife will wean him from folly."

"Ah, that's what his uncle used to say. 'Tis more like he'll wean her from virtue. Heaven pity the woman who gets into his clutches, for he'll show her none."

"You are too severe, Lady Grassthorpe. It ill becomes us, who have gone through the fire, to be censorious towards those who have yet to be tried."

"Can't you see, Kirton, that my love for him accounts for my anxiety? I pray day by day for the lad, but I cannot disguise from myself that he comes of a bad stock, and bids fair to realize the worst traditions of his unhappy family. But there, 'tis a long lane that never has a turning."

"Remember, Lady Grassthorpe, my lord

has been brought up in an indifferent school for virtue. Surround him with good people, give him a fond wife, and I, for one, will not despair of him. 'Tis said the greatest sinner makes the greatest saint."

"Then, Kirton, my nephew is in a fair way to become an archangel. You may be right, but for my part I cannot but think you are too ready to judge of others by yourself. At all events, we must, if possible, persuade him to try your remedy. Report says my own husband was wild in his young days, but marriage reformed him ; but I fear me it is too late with his lordship. I have heard sad stories of the sort of life he has been leading at Winterbourne. Ah, Kirton, a smooth tongue and a false heart wedded to an ancient lineage and a handsome face are a deadly peril to a pretty woman in a humble position."

Before Kirton could reply the scapegrace

of "ancient lineage and handsome face" entered the sombre apartment.

Arthur had done his best to compose his features into a decent expression of grief; but, try as he might, he could not for the life of him succeed. The fulsome attentions of the flunkeys, the deference and homage which had greeted him at every turn since entering the precincts of the baronial hall, had flattered his vanity and fooled his shallow nature to its utmost. It was impossible for him to repress or conceal his self-satisfaction, or the self-importance which revelled within his hollow heart. The conscious Earl of Grassthorpe stood confessed in his very bearing, and asserted itself in the mock humility which he adopted towards his aunt and her guest.

"My dear aunt, accept ten thousand apologies for my unavoidable delay, and the assurance of my most heart-felt condolence

with yourself in your sad bereavement. Colonel Kirton, your most humble servant to command. May I hope that the sincere friendship you felt for my late respected uncle may be extended to his worthless nephew ? ”

“ Humph ! ” rejoined his aunt. “ How long is it, pray, since you took to speaking the truth of yourself ? ”

“ My dear aunt, you must, at least, do me the justice to admit that I have never represented myself to you as anything but worthless.”

“ Yes ; you have been honest in that matter, because you knew I was not to be deceived. But a truce to your answering. Tell me, sir, why were you not here in time to pay proper respect to your uncle’s remains ? ”

“ Permit me to remind you that I did myself the honour of informing you that I was unavoidably delayed.”

“And I do myself and you the honour not to believe a word of it.”

“As you will.”

“Really, my lord, her ladyship, as I take it, is only anxious to learn the cause of your unfortunate delay. No doubt the messenger did not arrive in time,” interposed Kirton.

“No; the fellow spared neither whip nor spur; I was detained at Winchester.”

“And what should keep you at Winchester; that was not your nearest road?” asked the old lady bluntly.

“Really, Lady Grassthorpe, I must intreat pardon if I decline to answer the inquisitorial question you do me the honour to put to me.”

“Very well, sir, it’s not creditable, or you would be ready enough to say.”

“Your ladyship’s opinion is as correct as it is charitable,” retorted Arthur with some sarcasm; then he turned to Kirton, and

added, "I regret that you should have been an unwitting spectator of our domestic pleasantries; I trust you will favour me with your consideration in the many matters of business which will require my attention; I remember that my uncle always professed the highest regard for your valuable advice."

Kirton was not slow in acting upon the hint and, kissing Lady Grassthorpe's hand with antiquated gallantry, and bowing slightly to the new-made Earl, he withdrew, leaving the aunt and nephew to fight out their battle alone.

"Now, my dear aunt, don't you think it would be as well if we clearly, and once and for all, come to an understanding respecting our mutual positions. I trust I can appreciate the painful nature of the change which my uncle's death will necessarily make in your attitude towards myself; at the same

time let me suggest the expediency of not straining the relations between us."

"I am fully aware, sir, that you are master here now," said the old lady with a sudden accession of dignity; "allow me to congratulate you upon the delicacy with which you have reminded me of the fact, my Lord Grassthorpe; I shall not intrude long; you may depend upon my hurrying the workmen to get the Dowery House ready as quickly as possible."

"I assure you, aunt, I hope you will still make Grassthorpe your home; that is why I suggested a treaty of peace; in any case there is no need to hurry your departure, as I shall be leaving for town immediately."

"Peace can only exist between us, Arthur, when we are apart. More's the pity! You must go your own way and I must go mine."

"As you will," said the new owner of the coronet indifferently; "and by way of

making a beginning I will take my own way to the stables."

"May I ask how long your lordship proposes to remain here?" questioned the dowager sarcastically.

"Until the horses can be got ready," retorted young hopeful as he strode angrily from the room.

Lady Grassthorpe watched the retreating figure of her nephew with an expression of hard carelessness on her features, which nearly equalled his own; yes, there was an undoubted family likeness between these two, but slowly her face relaxed to an expression of almost melting tenderness, and the tears which had not flowed even at her husband's death dimmed the fierce brilliance of her eyes, and then trickled silently down her furrowed cheeks, and fell upon the withered nervous hands as they lay listless and forlorn in her lap.

“Ah, my poor boy! you are realizing my worst fears by this unfeeling beginning. What can I do! How can I save you from yourself! I am a poor, helpless, forlorn old woman!” Here the old gentlewoman wept outright, and the unaccustomed emotion shook her very being.

But Lady Grassthorpe was not the woman to give way to grief, however keen the anguish which caused it, for long. Habituated to self-control, the discipline of a lifetime quickly asserted itself, and she rang the bell none the less imperiously; then, having dried her eyes, she composed her features against the entrance of the servant.

“Present my compliments to Colonel Kirton, and say that I wish to speak with him at his convenience.”

Only a few moments elapsed ere Kirton presented himself.

“Kirton,” began Lady Grassthorpe, “I

have had another quarrel with my nephew."

"Yes," assented Kirton quietly, "I expected one was about to take place when I retired."

"It doesn't want a great knowlege of Arthur and me to predict that we shall quarrel before we have been together for five minutes. It was my fault, Kirton, I should have been more patient with the lad, and remembered that his was a spirit not likely to brook a rating from an old woman ; my poor brother could never bear reproof, and Arthur is just like his father."

"He is, indeed," admitted the Colonel.

"Kirton, what is to be done ? Advise me. He tells me he is going on to London at once, and if he arrives there in his present temper I dread to think what wild courses he may take."

"My dear old friend, what do you wish

me to do ? You know I am entirely at your service. Command me as you will. What would you advise ? ”

“ I don't know ! I don't know ! ” replied the old lady feebly.

“ Suppose, by way of commencement, I arrange to accompany him to London ; you remember he professed himself anxious for my advice.”

“ The very thing,” eagerly assented Lady Grassthorpe, brightening at the idea ; “ he respects your opinion more than that of any other man of his acquaintance, his good sense goes that length, at least ; if you can't influence him God knows the case is hopeless.”

“ I humbly assure your ladyship that I will do my best. When does my lord propose leaving ? ”

“ As soon as the horses are ready.”

“ Which means at once. By your ladyship's

leave I will go and prepare for the journey."

Kirton's preparation had, however, to be a hurried one, for Arthur, in a fever of impatience, appeared, almost directly, to take leave of his aunt.

Within the last few hours a terrible reaction had surged in upon the lad's mind, and it almost made him giddy. The chalice of pleasure rudely dashed from his lips by the series of unlucky events which had forced him to take refuge at Winterbourne was once more within his grasp, and his whole nature was parched with the fever of sensuous thirst, which would not be denied. No! he would go at once to London, and plunge again into that vortex of uncleanness, which was to his warped manhood as the very breath of life! At length his position was assured, and, in the pride of his place, and the lust of his power, he could indulge

to his heart's content, and his soul's damnation, and none might say him nay!

Having made his adieu to his aunt he descended the broad steps, at the foot of which stood the gilded and emblazoned state coach of the house of Grassthorpe, waiting to convey its new lord to the gay life of the town for which his heart was panting.

As he entered, assisted by the united efforts of half-a-dozen lackeys, he saw Kirton, carrying a small valise, coming down the steps.

"Do you propose to honour me with your company to town?" asked Arthur haughtily. He was surprised, but not altogether displeased, at the prospect of having a companion to relieve the lonesomeness of the journey; the worst company was better than that of his own thoughts.

"If your lordship will be so obliging. I have business of some importance in London,

and, as your lordship knows, my means barely justify my posting."

"Come in, man," cried his lordship heartily, "I shall insist on you stopping at my house in Red Lion Square while you remain in London ; that confounded plot business will have blown over by this time, and I flatter myself that I shall be able to afford you such entertainment in town as may be startling, even to a man of your experience. You'll find Grassthorpe House very different to what it was in my Uncle's time, for I mean to institute a reign there which shall make it known as the resort of every person of quality at the court end of the town. Come in, Kirton, I am sick of rustivating ; we are going to *live* now."

"Thank you," said Kirton, "I will accept your lordship's hospitality."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROAD TO RUIN.

SINCE the branch line on which Grassthorpe station stands has been opened to Swindon, and a train timed so as to meet the mail at that junction, the journey up to the metropolis can be done in a couple of hours. But prior to this state of affairs the journey made by Arthur, Earl of Grassthorpe, was, perhaps, the quickest on record. At least, it was not that gentleman's fault if it were not. At every change of horses he hurried the helpers and promised the postillions an extra guinea if they did the stage in even a few minutes under the usual time.

He was mad to get away from the old life and commence the new. He had resolutely put away the past and forced himself, as he vainly hoped, to forget. The whole place of remembrance in his life was for the moment occupied by imagination, and reflection was crowded out by anticipation.

The pace at which they travelled was too fast to admit of conversation being anything like continuous, and two or three times, when Kirton attempted to mention pressing matters of neglected business, Arthur showed a polite determination to hear nothing, and the colonel had to content himself with a resolve to discuss them as soon as he might be fortunate enough to find Arthur in a listening mood.

The old family mansion in Red Lion Square was ill prepared for its new occupant. The housekeeper knew enough of her new master to be certain that he would reside

chiefly in London, but not enough to know what changes he would be likely to wish made. Consequently all she could do was to give the gloomy old house such an air of welcome as was possible.

In his eyes the place looked forbidding enough, but he was glad of the meal which was hastily prepared for him, occupying the interval, until it should be ready, by sampling the contents of the cellar. Then he suddenly became talkative.

“Gad’zooks, Kirton, but I cannot stand this frowsy old dungeon. I shall get rid of it and take a place close to the Court.”

“Your lordship will scarce care to part with a house that has been in the family so long?” suggested Kirton.

“I suppose not,” said Arthur; “if I did folks would mistake me for one of the jumped-up Hanoverian lot. It’s cursed hard that one’s dignity should compel one to live in a prison.

Anyhow, one's dignity does not oblige one to keep all this wretched old furniture. I'll make a clean sweep of that and these thick-headed old numskulls, who may have been good enough for my uncle. I cannot, for the life of me, understand how he could have put up with such retainers. For my part, I shall fill the place with young fellows, who know the ways of the town and how to serve a gentleman."

Kirton was surprised as well as disgusted, but he felt that this was not the time to interfere. Nor could he bring himself to believe that, on reflection, Arthur would be guilty of such a breach of the manners and customs of the day, which regarded the discharge of old family servants as a distinct violation of social etiquette.

The meal being ended, Arthur announced that he was going to "White's" to finish the evening.

“I suppose,” suggested Kirton reflectively, “that you have considered the matter ; but I would remind you that the affair of the plot in which you were mixed up is not yet quite forgotten, and the air is full of rumours of attempts that are to be made to bring back the Stuarts.”

“Pshaw, man !” laughed Arthur. “You forget I am a peer now, and, therefore, perfectly safe. The Ministers will not be such fools as to interfere with a man who can give them two or three seats, and the Opposition are not likely to ask any questions until they see which way the cat jumps at least.”

“So, then, I perceive that, like your worthy uncle, you intend to support the Ministry,” returned Kirton, with thinly-veiled contempt.

“N—o,” said Arthur, very deliberately ; “I am not aware that I intend to honour

anybody with my support, Kirton, except, of course, myself. As for the seats, the Ministry or any one else may have them for aught I care—at my price. I don't purpose emulating that old fool, my honoured predecessor, in disposing of my goods on a system of payment by promises, which in his case had the additional disadvantage of never being redeemed. No, Kirton, honestly I have no turn for politics ; but, as a man of fashion, stap my vitals if I don't make my mark ! So here's for 'White's,' and a commencement. You accompany me, of course ? No ? Then, good-night ! ”

So our hero proceeded in a chair to “White's,” and Kirton went to bed.

The honest Colonel was not a little disgusted at his want of influence over Arthur when, about a week later, he learned that that gentleman had carried out his intention of disposing of the furniture and dismissing

the old servants, and found it a hard task to write the news to Lady Grassthorpe, who, he knew, would, for the sake of the family honour, make provision for the latter, though so doing would trench seriously upon her jointure.

When Arthur arrived at "White's," late though it was—past ten o'clock—he found the place in full swing; that is to say, all the respectable members had gone home, greatly to Arthur's relief, and the company present were as choice a collection of Mohocks and Macaronis as the town contained. Fortunately, as our hero thought, they were all disposed to aid him in his laudable ambition to become that which he had elected, viz., the worst of a bad set—a thing they were amply qualified to do, seeing that there was not enough morals, courage, or conscience in the whole crew to equip an ordinary Troglodyte.

Arthur was not destined, however, to get

through the evening without unpleasant experiences. In the first place, he was compelled to leave several specimens of his autograph behind him to cover his losses at piquet; and secondly, having to answer a number of well-meant, but none the less awkward, questions anent his life during the time of his banishment irritated him; and, to crown all, he met one of his former associates in the political plot which had necessitated his retirement, and, this gentleman being unacquainted with the various changes which had taken place in our hero's sentiments, he had been forced to explain that the welfare of the country was now a matter of indifference to him.

"I understand, my lord," was the answer he received. "I beg to congratulate you, not only upon having inherited the family estates, but on having also inherited its instincts of self-preservation."

Arthur felt the cutting sarcasm of the rejoinder all the more that he dared not resent it, and his chagrin was not decreased when he presently discovered that he was being severely left alone by this gentleman and his set, a particularly desirable one in Arthur's eyes.

He found some compensation, however, in the fact that a large number of the company whom he had never seen before were ready enough to lavish that adulation upon him which his soul loved, and to introduce him to fresh walks in the ways of wickedness, with the existence of which he was hitherto unacquainted.

On the whole, therefore, notwithstanding its drawbacks, Arthur may be congratulated upon having spent an enjoyable evening. He was astounded next morning at the number of visitors who called to remind him of engagements he had contracted, and

to assure him of their undying devotion. Such as he did not care for he ignored without compunction ; but there was one, for the evening, which was too fascinating for him to resist, although he had made an appointment with his lawyer and agent to discuss the position and prospects of his affairs.

This was to meet a select company of men of fashion at the lodgings of the Hon. William Neville, an elder brother of Mr. Thomas Neville, whose acquaintance we so happily made at Winchester—a gentleman who shared all his brother's vices, without his virtues, or even his intelligence, and for that reason, doubtless, had been preferred to a position at the Court.

The main attraction of the evening, however, was to be found in the promised presence of Paquita, a recently-fledged dancer, about whom it was just then the fashion to rave.

Arthur went, saw, and was conquered. It would be tedious to trace all the steps by which this pretty Phryne fascinated our somewhat too susceptible hero. Suffice it to say that he was an easy prey, and might be found more often at the sumptuous lodgings which had been taken for her in Covent Garden by the elderly admirer who had persuaded her to try her fortunes in London, than at his own respectable mansion, where Kirton sat in solitude, like an embodied rebuke.

The Earl of Grassthorpe was a prize of moment to the dancer. He was young, careless, and popular, and it was not long before the clever and unscrupulous woman had involved Arthur in such extravagant expenditure as would have threatened, but for his privileges as a Peer, to land him in the Fleet.

More than once Kirton, mindful of his

promise to Lady Grassthorpe, had interposed between him and his infatuation, but without any other effect than a straining of the relations between them, which the Colonel judged dangerous to the maintenance of his position. He concluded, therefore, that his only course was to allow Arthur to so thoroughly involve himself as to compel that young gentleman to retire to Grassthorpe.

The Colonel's hope, however, was defeated by the Paquita herself. That far-seeing lady discovered that she had at length come to within measurable distance of the end of Arthur's available resources. Consequently she made herself secure by encouraging the attentions of another nobleman, neither so young nor so popular as our hero, but much more powerful and wealthy—to wit, his Grace the Duke of Bancaster—and one day crowned her perfidy by coolly

informing Arthur that he need not trouble himself to call again, as, his grace having intimated that he did not particularly care when at her house for the society of the Earl of Grassthorpe, she had given her man orders not to admit him in future.

Arthur was not the man to take his *coup de grace* quietly, and of course there was a row royal. He charged her with treachery, whereupon she remarked that he had no claim upon her consideration, and that she had a perfect right to change her protector whenever she chose, and should exercise it at her own discretion.

With Bancaster he fared equally badly, for when he consulted with some friends as to the advisability of calling that nobleman out, they laughed at him, as they pointed out that he had no ground of quarrel upon the mere *ipse dixit* of such a woman, and that even if his Grace of Bancaster had made use

of the words in question, they contained no imputation on his honour, which was the only ground upon which he had a right to demand satisfaction. So Arthur was compelled perforce to meet his favoured rival as if nothing had happened, though it was gall and wormwood to him to do so.

Arthur was wounded in his self-love, and very bitter it made him ; his anger knew no bounds when he thought of the scurvy manner in which fortune had treated him. He had been sucked dry and then thrown carelessly aside, like an empty orange, by the woman upon whom he had lavished his substance. He had been made a fool of, and now was the laughing-stock of his own set, who regarded the affair as a huge joke against one of whom they were all more than a trifle jealous.

The conduct of the courtesan, and Arthur's uncomfortable mood which was its con-

sequence, set that gentleman, very much against his inclination, thinking of Elsie. He dwelt with morbid self-pity upon the difference between the two women, and wished that he had been near enough to Elsie to claim a little of the sympathy she was always so ready to bestow upon him.

Poor Elsie! he was very fond of her, although at times she was a trifle tedious, not having Paquita's fund of spirits, nor even that lady's wealth of *piquante* japes and improper stories; but she had been very fond of him, and he remembered her with tender compunction, which reminded him that he had not allowanced her, and gave him the opportunity of indulging a little self-complacent resolve to do so presently, that is to say, as soon as his crippled finances should permit the luxury of doing a benevolent deed.

Meanwhile reflection upon neither woman

giving him the satisfaction which his sensibility demanded, he consoled his wounded spirit by drinking heavily, and plunging into sundry other debaucheries without delay, by way of manifesting to his associates the completeness of his indifference.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIST OF MISERY.

THERE is a difference between sunlight and sunshine. The one is a sufficient quantity in and of itself, the other possesses an added quality of gaiety and glory. The presence of the one suffices for intelligence, the other prompts to delight and inspires joy.

In Elsie's life and home there was light enough, but the old sunshine had departed with the summer. The neighbours noticed no difference in the externals of the Steele household, but there was a subtle change in its atmosphere.

The daily routine of the home went on as

usual. Every morning Mattie came into the kitchen before the sun was well risen, and swept it as she had always done. Every morning Samson, a few minutes later, came down yawning, stretched himself with due deliberation, exchanged salutations with the handmaid, and then proceeded leisurely to open the shutters and gaze up and down the quiet street; then swept up the shop, liberated the big yard dog, and finally turned into the kitchen to breakfast. Every morning the saddler, some half-hour later, might be seen seated in his usual corner making or mending horse gear, ever and again looking up to exchange salutations with some passer-by, or to direct Samson as the apprentice laboured at the less delicate parts of the craft of saddlery. Every morning Mrs. Steele busied herself about those innumerable household matters which should be the guarantee of every good housewife against the wiles of

Satan, varying the monotony of her duties by scolding in good-humoured fashion Mattie and Elsie impartially. Every morning Elsie came down a little later than the rest, because now every morning she had to say a little prayer for the scrapegrace who had deserted her which was too sacred to be included among the rough and ready generalities which formed the staple of the petitions which her father was accustomed to offer whilst the tea was a-brewing.

Yet, none the less, every day did the indefinable difference increase, and its influence upon every member of the household widen and strengthen.

Every day did the sunshine become a little more, and yet a little more, obscured. The gloom of unrecognised foreboding filled the house, for the mist of misery was in the air.

Everyone of the little household felt that

a change had taken place in the daughter. Elsie was not so gay as of old, and her step had lost its lightness ; she was absent and listless ; at times this once merry little bird was positively dull, and when she thought herself unobserved there would steal over her face a look of voiceless sorrow.

Steele spoke more than once to his wife about it ; but Mrs. Steele managed to silence him without banishing his forebodings by pointing out that girls were queer cattle, and that to a girl like Elsie the change of the year was always a trying time ; let winter come and she would go bail the girl would recover both her spirits and her roses. For a time the mother tried to silence her own misgivings by the same sophistry but for this her womanly instinct was too keen ; she had once been a girl, and romantic ; and had small difficulty in tracing the cause of her child's lassitude, and Mrs. Steele was disposed

to be very bitter against the fine town gentleman who had stolen the girl's heart and then gone away and made no sign, all the more that she entertained no very high idea of the departed's honour, or, as she probably more accurately phrased it, his "honesty."

But perhaps next to Mrs. Steele the person who was most troubled by the change in Elsie was the red-headed ungainly apprentice, to whom, as we have seen, his young mistress was little less than an object of worship. The first thing which aroused a sense of vague uneasiness in him was that of late Elsie had treated him with unwonted gentleness and consideration. Her obvious sadness made his heart ache, and, in his dumb and blundering way, he yearned to express the sympathy which is seldom spoken. Failing in this he must needs content himself with a delicious participation in her joylessness.

With Mattie the effect of the altered atmosphere of the house was chiefly shown by an instability, and a general tendency to wrong-headedness altogether foreign to the girl's happy-go-lucky disposition. Mattie was an obstinately optimistic philosopher, and such find it extremely difficult to breathe the air of misery which is native to the pessimistic.

And Elsie ? Elsie was fast getting hopeless. Arthur had been gone for four months ; every day she had sat by the lattice window of her chamber watching to see him come down the street ; every night she had lain awake listening for the rumble of the wheels of the coach which should bring him. At the sight of every stranger she had palpitated with the hope that at least he might be the bearer of a message, and every week she had loitered in the street to meet the stage-waggon which brought the letters.

But four months had passed and he had neither written nor made sign. She had tormented herself with fears ; he might be dead and she a widow, deprived of even the melancholy comfort of mourning for him ; or ill, and calling for her in his pain and thinking her heartless because she did not go to him. And then there began to creep into her heart, little by little, a greater dread still, the dread that she was deserted ; and, strive as she might, this horrible fear would take possession of her mind until beneath its influence she felt like one battling with a coming sickness.

She was loyal to Arthur in every breath she drew, for, thinking no shame in their union she longed to tell her mother, but would not, for fear it might injure her lover. Had she not promised, and must she not perform ? Yet Elsie knew that a time might come when concealment would not be

possible, and when, be the consequences to Arthur what they might, the truth would have to be known.

One day she heard her father speaking in terms of bitter contempt of a woman who had had an illegitimate child, and like a swift flash of light the thought passed through her mind that she must see Tyler at once and obtain her lines.

She found Tyler in his forge and alone. The mayor was generally alone ; he had dissipated all the business he once possessed, and the loss had not sweetened his disposition ; the help rendered by Crosby would have sufficed to clear him, but another speculation having presented itself he had lacked the moral courage to resist its seduction, and the money which should have established his credit went the way of all that preceded it.

He, like Elsie, had been anxiously looking for the return of the absentee, on whom he

considered he had established such a claim as that gentleman would find it difficult to repudiate. Curious as it may appear at first sight, the blacksmith was feeling intensely bitter against Arthur, which, perhaps, ceases to be surprising if we reflect that the latter had done him a good turn.

Somehow Tyler had succeeded in persuading himself that the bad fortune which had attended him of late was attributable to Arthur. Yes, the witches had followed his guest into his house, and wrought harm at every turn. He was a fool ever to have taken compassion on the son of his old benefactor, and thereby incurred the displeasure of the witches. Ever since Crosby had come under his roof things had all gone wrong, not a single venture he had undertaken prospered, every speculation he had touched turned out wrong, his money had melted in his fingers, his credit was gone,

and his character was fast going ; he felt that his feet were in slippery places, and that his steps would slide in due season.

For all these things he determined, if possible, Arthur should pay ; some one should suffer with him, and if he went down he would drag with him to ruin as many as he could reach. Steele and his daughter, because she was his daughter, he was resolved should suffer, but how to get at the prime cause of his ruin was a problem that would not be solved.

Consequently the sight of Elsie's face, full of trouble, gave him unbounded delight ; if the greater prey were denied him, he could at least console himself by feasting his eyes upon the misery of the less.

“ Well, Mistress Elspeth, an' what brings thee to see me ? Neighbour Steele does not know o' thy comin', do' he now, Mistress Elspeth—Mistress Crosby I had ought to

say, hadn't I?" he added, dropping his voice and favouring her with a leer.

"I suppose so, Mr. Tyler," hesitated the girl.

"Yes, but I dunno' for that en; whether maids as be handfasted has any right to take their chap's names is a thing I has my doubts on. Howsumnever, let that bide, thou's come to see me for summat. What be it?"

"I wanted to know if you had heard when Mr. Crosby is coming back?"

"Why, see that now," exclaimed Tyler, "'tis odd, but I wanted to see 'ee on the same matter mysen, so to speak it. Nay, 'an thou knows't not, 'taint in reasonlike as I should know."

"I feared not; I hoped you might."

"I dare say thee dids't, 'tis in reason, I be thinkin'," said Tyler.

Elsie looked at him curiously, but the

simple-hearted girl was unable to read the repulsive meaning which lay behind the man's sardonic grin, so she merely said again, very softly, "Yes, I hoped you might. Do you know where a letter would find him?"

"Nay, missus, I don't. I wish I did; when a man go around the country like a Joey in a jerry-go-nimble, in a manner of putting it, 'taint in reason that such'en should want for folk to know where to find him. Master Crosby 'ull none come back," he added with a sudden accession of ferocity. "He'll none come back, I tell 'ee."

"How dare you say such a thing, Mr. Tyler?" asked Elsie, with blazing eyes that were not fuller of indignation than of terror at the hideous possibility which his brutal words had suddenly called from its dark lurking-place in the hidden recesses of her own heart.

“ I don’t say’en, so to speak it plain ; but it do look that summut. Thou cans’t not deny it thysen ; there be four months agone an’ thou hastna’ heard o’ he. ’Tis for thy sake I say it. ’Tis bad for thee, an’ I pities thee with my whole heart.”

“ Yes, yes,” said the girl miserably, “ I was wrong to speak so, Mr. Tyler.”

“ No offence, lass, I pities ’ee, an’ if there was ought I could do I’d do it, an’ ready.”

Elsie plucked up a little courage.

“ If you please,” she said, “ will you give me my lines ? ”

“ Give thee what, lass ? ”

“ My lines ; the paper you wrote when we were handfasted.”

“ Ah,” said Tyler, with a regretful shake of the head, “ thou’st asked me the one thing I may not do. Thou considers thysen a married woman yet does not know what belongs to ’ee. The paper were given me to

take care on by Master Crosby, an' 'tis agin' the law that I should give it up to aught but he. I'm surprised at 'ee, Elspeth Steele, askin' me, chief magistrate of the place, to break the law."

"I didn't know it was breaking the law," said Elsie, humbly. "Oh! Mr. Tyler, what can I do? what must I do?"

"Oh! then I see—thou mun e'en show thysen a married woman, must 'ee?" Seeing that the girl made no answer, but hung her head, he continued, "Make no fear, my lass, though I canna give thee the paper, I'll take care them shall see it as should. Yes! yes! trust me, they shall see it, at the right time. Good day, Mistress, don't 'ee be afeared, they shall see it."

And with this poor comfort Elsie took her way homeward.

* * * * *

On a day Elsie stood in a cold sun-ray,

and flushed with sudden heat. What was this that fluttered at her heart? The little white dove that had come from the presence of God, a living soul. Then sudden faintness seized her, and all the world went from her sight and sense.

“Elsie, lass,” called Mrs. Steele, as she entered her daughter’s room, “where did’s’t thee put my——Gramercy! the child has swooned,” said the good woman; as she knelt by the collapsed and huddled form.

With trembling fingers the mother loosened her child’s dress.

“——Great God!” and spots of blood, as it were her own blood, slowly moved before the eyes of the dazed woman.

CHAPTER X.

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM.

THE weeks wore on, and the necessity of telling her father grew more obvious to Elsie every day. And with the necessity grew the dread, until it became a burden of terror too great for the girl to bear. Every day she tried to summon up courage, and every-day resolution failed her, and she listened painfully as it whispered, "No, not to-day, to-morrow; I cannot tell him to-day." And the morrow came, and still Elsie said, "to-morrow."

At length fate took the necessity of fixing a time out of Elsie's hands.

Steele was in the market-place. Since early morning the saddler had been engaged in a task of all others the most distasteful to his nature. He hated asking people for money, and on this occasion the pain of more than one refusal had increased the ordinary irksomeness of the task. Moreover, it had been a wild, cold day, the wind blowing in sullen fitful gusts from the east under snow-laden clouds. Winter had come suddenly, and its earliness added to its unwelcomeness. A cutting sleet had been falling during the whole day, and Steele, thoroughly chilled and wet, was in no very amiable mood. He was haggling with a farmer's wife about some repairs. She was drunk, and said Steele charged more than he should, and then became abusive, telling him, at length, to go home to that shameless wench, his daughter, adding an epithet that in its brutal coarseness turned him sick, and

chilled him with the coldness of the second death. The woman gave a drunken chuckle as she watched him stagger and then reel away without the money.

The distance between the saddler's house and the market-place was not great, but it was long enough for the man to realize the horrid possibilities of the woman's cruel words. Instinctively he remembered a hundred trifling circumstances, unheeded at the time, which all pointed to the same ghastly conclusion ; Elsie's unwonted listlessness, the creeping pallor that had lately rendered her life all colourless, the oppressive atmosphere of the home, all these rushed in like grey and ghostly fiends into an empty hell, and then began a wild, mad dance of whirling passions, and through the mirky haze of his unrest there gleamed the lightnings of bitterest resentment ; the soul of the man was a-crawl with unclean creatures

until the sight frightened him. He wiped his clammy forehead and fiercely upbraided himself for heeding the words of a drunken beast; steadying himself, he opened the door of his home and entered.

There was no one in the kitchen but Mrs. Steele, Mattie was out, it being market day, and Samson was away mending harness at farmer Thornton's.

"Wife," said he, "a hag in the market-place just now called our Elsie a——ha! ha! ha! ha! She was drunk, she was drunk. Yes," he added in a hoarse whisper, "it ain't true, wife, it ain't true, is it? Do you hear? It ain't true, I say."

"No," replied Mrs. Steele, sadly and very slowly, "no——but——"

"But, but—yes," shouted Steele, "go on woman!"

"But would to God she was married," sobbed Mrs. Steele. And she turned to

leave him ; as she did so she saw him step forward with outstretched and uplifted hands, his bloodshot eyes fixed wildly upon the spot she had just left ; then, with a cry like an ox that has been felled by its death blow, he sank all huddled into a chair—stunned.

“Steele,” cried his wife, “don’t take on so, the poor child were deceived. That scoundrel Crosby handfasted with her and persuaded her as ’twere a’ most a marriage.”

But the man was silent, nor made sign nor motion to tell that he heard aught, though as one in a dream he heard all. Even the ticking of the clock fell like the blows of a hammer on his overstrung nerves, and he found himself counting the seconds and trying to make them keep time with the chirping of a cricket at the back of the hearth, while the wind outside in the darkling roared and whirled and moaned as if it were sorry for the world and all its people,

when it thought of the storm it should bring in the night.

"Elsie," said her mother when she reached the pretty old chamber, "I think, mayhap, thoud'st better go and tell thy father right away, poor lass; he knows summat a'ready."

"Oh! mother, mother," sobbed the poor girl, "how can I?"

"If thou doesn't others will. 'Tis better he should learn from thee, my lass."

"Oh! I can't, I can't," moaned the girl. "It will hurt him so—he'll kill me."

"Nay, nay, he'll none hurt thee, child. Mayhap he'll be angry, for sure, but theed'st best go."

"Yes, yes," sighed Elsie; "mother, pray with me."

Then the two women knelt, and Mrs. Steele said the "Lord's Prayer," which was all she could think of, adding, "God bless her," as a supplementary petition.

For a few minutes there was silence. Then Elsie rose, kissed her mother, and turned towards the door to face the dreaded interview. Suddenly she found her mother by her side.

“ I’m coming wi’ee, my child.”

“ Not so, mother,” said Elsie gently ; “ t’will do no good. I’ll go alone,” she added, with hopeless firmness.

“ Indeed, indeed, poor child, but I fear me for thee. Thy father is a violent man in his passions, when he accounts him wronged.”

“ He’ll none harm me, mother. It is I, his daughter, who will harm him—poor father !”

And filled with a strange quiet Elsie glided from the room.

On the threshold she turned ; the sight of her mother’s beseeching face unnerved her, and rushing forward, she fell into her mother’s arms, and pillowing her head upon her

mother's breast, she shook like a leaf with suppressed excitement and terror.

For a few moments the mother and child stood locked in that embrace of sadness ; then Elsie quietly lifted her head, and with a light caress of her soft hand upon her mother's grief-wrought face she whispered, " Pray for me, mother, pray for me all the time ; " and then slipping from her mother's arms she passed down the staircase with firm footstep and with a feeling as though she had somehow left herself in her mother's arms, while her bodily presence had gone down the stairs to face her father.

Steele was sitting in the carved high-backed chair he affected, with his head buried in his hands, staring through his half-opened fingers into the glowing embers of the wood fire. There was no other light in the room ; but the fire glow was sufficient to show Elsie that the face bending over it was

hard and stern, and that the furrows seemed deeper than of yore. She waited for a little, with the door in her hand, hoping that he would turn round and speak, for the stillness smote upon her heart deathly and chill ; but Steele remained immovable in his rigid attitude, so Elsie went up to him.

“ Father,” she said softly, “ father.”

Steele did not seem to hear her, for he sat still glowering into the embers. Just then the house dog came in ; she had gone out with Mattie, but had returned on her own account, and she began, as usual, to jump up at Elsie, and by little low barks to express delight at seeing her.

“ Curse the dog !” shouted Steele, roused from his dull lethargy, and kicking at her savagely ; “ take that for fawning on a woman of shame !”

“ Father, father,” gasped Elsie, “ oh no, no ! not that.”

“ Yes, that, *that* ; what else art thou, pray ? ”
cried the man savagely.

Elsie's head dropped lower and lower under the burden of her shame and her father's brutal reproach. “ Was he right ? ” she asked herself ; “ was it true that she—she, Elsie, was that nameless thing her father had said ? ” Oh the anguish of that interminable profound of silence in which Elsie stood under the white light of his searching question.

At length Steele broke it, and began in a low, harsh voice, a weird and crooning monologue.

“ My father, he wor a labouring man, toiling wi' his fingers from dawn till dark, and eating his bread, i'the sweat of his brow all his days, and so wor my grandfathers before he, all honest men and true, without stain or tarnish on their good names, and so was all our women, my mother, an' her mother, an'

hearn, all good and respectable, a holdin' up their heads before their fellows in honesty till thou, thou mun disgrace us all, an' make us bow down our heads like bullrushes ; thou mun make us a by-word and a scoff, thou mun go leasing with that lecherous, black-hearted, smooth-tongued villain, wi' his fine talk and his genteel ways, an' his rakehelly swagger, a lookin' honesty out o' countenance, curse him ! ”

“ Don't, father, don't,” sobbed the poor girl. “ I can't bear it.”

“ Thou cannot bear it ! I'm thinkin' thou hast e'en borne more than that, an' thou'll have to bear more ; dost hear ? Do'ee think anyone will speak to'ee, do'ee think I'm going to have such as thou living in my house ? Thou comest of honest folk. Why mun I keep such a thing as thou about the house ? ”

“ You won't turn me out, father, will you ? ” said Elsie with a gasp.

“ Won’t turn’ee out, won’t I ? ” shouted the infuriated man. “ What else art fit for, pray ? Shall it be said that the son of my father sheltered a scarlet female in his house ? Am I going to keep you here a plaything and a rallying stock for all the lewd men i’ the place, because thou art what thou art ? ”

“ Father, father,” cried the girl, “ not that, oh, not that ! ”

“ An’ what art thou, I’d like to know ? ”

“ Oh, I don’t know—I don’t know ; but not that, I was deceived, father.”

She was leaning for support against the chimney-breast. This interview was worse than she had been able to realize by anticipation. The poor dog, mindful of the kick aimed at her, had kept well against the wall out of harm’s reach ; she now crept quietly into Elsie’s skirts and licked the hand that hung all lifeless at her side.

“ Deceived ! ” at length replied Steele

sternly ; " what dost mean by that ? Did'ee think yon tomfoolery were marriage ? I know as thou did'st not."

" I don't know," said the poor girl wearily. " Sometimes I thought it was, and then sometimes everything seemed dark. I think Mr. Crosby didn't mean to do anything that was wrong, father."

" Didn't mean to do anything that was wrong, you fool ; what else did he mean ? Mayhap he thought it was right, his duty, perhaps, to seduce my daughter and make my name a laughing stock for fools. Damn him for an infernal scoundrel."

" Don't, father," pleaded Elsie. " I can bear your reproaches, for I deserve them, but I will not, no, I will not, listen to curses on Arthur."

" Oh ! you won't, won't you ? Well, if you stop in this house you'll hear little else, I warrant you. Curse him ! Yes, I'll curse him, an' you, too, girl. Dos't hear me ? You have disgraced

me, me, girl, me," he almost shrieked. "Here I have raised myself to be an alderman and like to rise higher and become mayor, and mayhap alderman o' the gild even, but for a scarlet jade and a licentious fly-by-night. I'm disgraced ; but what's that to thee ? Nothing, nothing, so thou hast thy pleasure. Thou knewest well enough that this handfasting were no marriage, the more shame on thee for covering thyself with the custom o' the worthless of Purbeck ; thou knewest that Crosby did not mean to follow it wi' marriage, the lousel."

"Oh, father, he did, he did ; I swear he did."

"Did, did he ; then why didn't he do it ?"

"Father, remember he had to go away."

"Yes, he's gone ; my curse go with him. Went as soon as he knew that nought but marriage could save us from shame. Why didn't he marry thee ? Answer me that, you——"

Elsie hung her head and was silent ; what could she plead ?

“ Thou art disgraced, and a disgrace now and for ever ; no better art thou than a low woman of the town, a mere nameless female. The mayor may take thee up an’ whip thee i’ the Bridewell.”

“ Father, father, have pity, forgive me. Oh, what can I do, what can I do ? ” she cried wildly. “ I know I have brought shame on you, bitter shame and disgrace ; forgive me, father, you who have loved me so well.”

“ Ay,” said the man bitterly, “ I loved thee well, and well hast thou repaid me. I’ll be pointed at throughout the town as the father of a thing you don’t like to hear me name ; but thou’ll have to listen to it often enough without my saying it. Ain’t I giped at already ? Why should I ha’ a wench who drags my name through the mire, arter I’ve

made it respected by honest labour for nigh on fifty years? Early and late I strove to make a name for thee, and now thou mun needs—. God give me one day to get a grip of that popinjay yonder as seduced thee, that—that Crosby thing o' thine."

"Nay, father, nay; mine was the sin, let mine be the punishment," cried the miserable girl. "I cannot, I will not hear him reproached."

"Wilt not, wilt not!" choked her father. "Thou wilt not hear him reproached? Then get thee hence; go thy ways, an' thou'lt defend the man as has wrought thy ruin an' my disgrace; thou art no daughter o' mine. Get thee hence, I say. Dos't hear me? Go to thy like, thou harlot."

And seizing her by the wrist he dragged the half fainting girl across the floor to the portal, flung open the door, and, with a horrible oath thrust her out into the black pitiless night.

How the pitiless wind shrieked and whirled through the great kitchen, as Steele banged to the door in his frenzy and bolted it furiously! But the tempest without was as nought to the fury of his outraged selfishness. His face worked in all diabolical contortions of rage. Then he faced about and saw by the fitful glimmer of the firelight the senseless body of his wife lying at the foot of the stairway.

CHAPTER XI.

BUT WEAKNESS, SLOTH AND SIN MAKE MEN
AS LEAVES ON EDDIES.

DURING these few months life had gone ill with our hero. The robes of a peer however imposing do not guard the wearer from trouble, though they may serve to hide it from the eyes of the vulgar. The fever of care and the canker of disappointment find congenial atmosphere in the heat generated beneath the ermine whose heavy folds but serve to prevent the weaver from shaking himself free of them. Proud though he might be of his strawberry leaves, there were occasions occurring with ever increasing

frequency, when Arthur would gladly have renounced them in exchange for that freedom to come and go as he pleased which he had enjoyed as plain Mr. Crosby. His misdeeds were coming home to roost, and the stately mansion but gave them ampler room in which to disport themselves unchallenged.

Arthur was not such a fool as to believe that members of the peerage could claim exemption from the consequences of their own acts ; but he certainly felt that privileges which, whilst exempting him from the possibility of arrest, were incomplete in that they allowed duns and other such disagreeable persons to congregate on his doorstep, and left his goods at the mercy of the sheriff's officer. If he had stopped to inquire he would have been forced to admit that his troubles were the direct outcome of his own folly. It is astonishing how little consolation a man derives from this reflection. If

a poor peer insists on emulating the state of a rich one he has small cause of complaint that the result should be as disastrous in his case as if he had been a mere commoner. The late Earl of Grassthorpe had in his day tried much the same game as his nephew was now playing, and the charges he had been compelled to lay on the estates had materially reduced the means at the disposal of his successor ; to so great a degree, in fact, that Arthur's own patrimony was insufficient to put the balance on the right side. Still he had started with what would have sufficed to enable him to keep up an adequate appearance, only that unlucky pursuit of the Paquita had cleared him out at one fell swoop. The rate of interest was then so excessive that a comparatively small debt assumed the proportions of a formidable affair, and, fortunately for him, Arthur's patrimony was so strictly entailed, and so heavily

burdened, that he could neither sell nor mortgage ; and thus the security he had to offer being of a doubtful nature he was compelled to raise what money he required at usurious interest.

The future that lay before him was certainly not inspiring, resolving itself as it did into either peddling on from year to year exchanging one difficulty for another, or of a speedy and undignified retreat into the retirement of the country, where he would quickly sink to the level of the bucolic squires around him, to become a sufferer at once from the *ennui* of the present and regrets for the past. From time to time he would confide to Kirton that things were not well with him and that his worries were increasing ; but, as he always refused to make a clean breast of his embarrassments, Kirton could do little more than assist in depressing him. On the whole, it is hardly to be

wondered at that with this uninviting prospect for the future Arthur should determine to get what enjoyment he could for the present. So he became an *habitué* of any and every *rendezvous* where he hoped he might pluck a feather from the wing of pleasure.

One morning as he was lounging alone over his chocolate, for Kirton had gone to pay his yearly visit to an old comrade who had taken up his residence at Bath, his attention was arrested by an advertisement in the current number of the *Glass Window* which aroused his curiosity by setting out with many flourishes that at the theatre in the Haymarket a person would, that evening, “play on a common walking cane the music of every instrument now used, to surprising perfection ; that he would on the stage get into a tavern quart bottle, without equivocation, and while there sing several songs and

suffer any spectator to handle the bottle ; that if any spectator should come masked he would, if requested, declare who they were, and that, in a private room, he would produce the representation of any person dead with whom the party requesting it should converse some minutes, as if alive," with divers other magical marvels, "to begin half after six."

As this seemed to promise a novelty in the noble art of dissipation Arthur instructed his domestic chaplain to repair to the theatre in the course of the morning and engage a private box, and himself calling a chair, went to the club to collect a party of choice spirits to share in his strictly classical enjoyment. This he had very little difficulty in doing, as fortune favoured him so far that the Hon. Thomas Neville, whose acquaintance he had renewed at Winchester, and two or three gentlemen, of Corinthian tastes, hap-

pened to be disengaged, and were so good as to agree to dine with him at Red Lion Square beforehand.

It will hardly surprise any of our readers to be informed that the party were none of them painfully sober when they arrived at the theatre, where a great company had assembled to witness the performance so enticingly announced. It was an interesting assemblage, largely made up of cits and their wives, with a goodly muster of noisy apprentices in the gallery, the rear of which was resplendent with gaily-dressed flunkies. A few persons of quality occupied the boxes, and, then as now, the inveterate sightseer was well in evidence ; here and there might be seen a prosy-looking clergyman, one of those parasites of the church which unfortunately abounded ; a country gentleman with his buxom madam ; or a haberdasher, tired and tricked, like the man of quality he affected to be.

Our hero and his party did not arrive at the theatre until a few minutes after the time at which the performance was advertised to commence, when they found the assembly in a state of growing impatience at the non-appearance of the man of mirth and marvel. The audience came fully prepared to be entertained, and noisily expressed their resentment at the delay. The scene was entirely one after the Hon. Thomas Neville's heart, and whilst that gentleman was sufficiently sober to foresee a row, he was just drunk enough to be totally indifferent as to the cause, so long as he might be privileged to participate in the fun. Just as they had taken their seats the curtain was withdrawn at the corner, and, in response to reiterated calls from the pit, a starveling fellow was thrust on the stage to make an announcement, which he did in a trembling voice, to the effect that if the performer did not appear

the money paid for admission should be returned to the audience. Hereupon the Hon. Thomas Neville called for a chorus, which he proceeded to chortle at the top of his voice to a tune, if such it could be styled, known only to himself. The burden of his ditty appeared to be mainly concerned with the vagaries of a certain quart bottle which somehow managed to get into exceedingly bad company, connected with which were a number of such highly indecent circumstances that the groundlings refused to allow the singer to proceed, at the same time shaking their fists and cudgels menacingly at the box, at which stage of the proceedings the Hon. Thomas, taking off his hat and bowing very low to the angry and excited mob, and steadying himself by the front of the box, proceeded to address them, under the impression that it was an election and he had been called upon for a speech.

“Ladish and gentlemen,” he began, “I beg pardon, free—hic—enlightened voters ; I come b’fore you to so—hic—licit honour of your s’port. I do wantch s’port, don’t I, Grassthorpe ? ” he appealed to Arthur.

Here his voice was drowned by the imprecations from below, in deference to which manifestation of feeling his friends pulled him down from behind. The moment they had released their grasp, however, our irrepres-sible sprang up again like a jack-in-the-box, and, in the lull caused by his disappearance, resumed, wagging his head and shaking his forefinger sagely at the howling house, “You know the pricesh ’greed on for your votes ; very shorry, ’pon my word, can’t give you more, stap my vitals, if can ; Grass-thorpe know I can’t give any more—hic—don’t you Crobbish ? ”

Here the uproar became positively deafening, and, upon being pulled once more

into the background, the Hon. Thomas sat down on the step leading into the box, and burst into a flood of tears, protesting with loud lamentations that he should never be able to look his father in the face again if he were not returned to Parliament, declaring that his father was very hard on him, very hard indeed, and that if he should lose the sinecure place which he received in return for supporting the government he would be reduced to the utmost destitution and end his days miserably in the Fleet.

Suddenly, however, his mood changed, and remembering where he was and the business of the evening, he quickly took up his old position in the front of the box and gravely announced that for double the money the conjuror would go into a pint bottle. This was the last straw. The audience had come to be fooled, it is true, but not by Mr. Neville, and a number of them

made a rush for the box, a proceeding which appeared to afford our worthy friend keen delight, for, laughing very loudly, he seized a lighted candle from one of the sconces, intending to throw it among the audience, but his aim being misguided by his eyesight, he succeeded instead in throwing it on to the stage, where it promptly set light to the curtain.

The greater part of the spectators hurried out, calling on the way at the pay box for their money, which, of course, was not returned to them, owing to the action of certain thoughtful individuals who had previously taken the precaution to storm that shrine of mammon, and carry off the box containing the cash.

As the more respectable portion of the audience left the building their place was taken by the street mob, who, breaking in, tore down the inside of the house, and

burnt it in the street, making a flag of the remnant of the curtain, which had been extinguished, which they placed on a pole in the middle of the bonfire.

In the general stampede our friends experienced considerable difficulty in conveying their companion through the tortuous passages of the theatre into the street. More than once their embarrassment was increased by Mr. Neville's sitting down to rest, and flatly refusing to proceed any further; in fact, evincing a ferocious yearning for the blood of any gentleman who should attempt to disturb him, maintaining the while a smile of blandest unconcern, and insisting, with a pathos touching to witness, that he had not yet seen "gen'elms' an'—hic!—quart bottle," and that he felt it most unkind that a man of sensibility should be requested to go home before the performance had commenced.

By the time they reached the streets the bonfire was blazing merrily, and round it were prancing half the dissolute people of the court end of the town. By the ruddy glow Mr. Neville stood—or, with a strict regard to accuracy, we should say, leant—confessed. Nor had he, apparently, any wish to preserve an incognito ; rather, on the contrary, he evinced an insane desire to distinguish himself among the dancers.

Before he could carry his praiseworthy intent into effect a voice cried, “ Here’s the man as tried to burn down the theatre ! ” and immediately the little party found themselves surrounded by a threatening crowd, who hustled and punched them with much good will, until the more sober members of the party managed to draw their swords, which action, combined with the rumour that the Guards were coming, caused the immediate disappearance of their assailants,

leaving them in sole possession of the Hay-market.

During the scrimmage several members of the little band had been detached from their comrades, and, wisely judging that safety lay in retreat, had betaken themselves to their respective abodes for repairs, leaving Arthur with two of his friends, including the Hon. Thomas Neville, who, minus his coat, wig, and hat, and with his remaining garments in various stages of dilapidation, was seated on the pavement, his back against the wall of a house, his nose swollen, his face bloody, and his right eye, for the nonce, incapacitated for further service, but, nevertheless, exceedingly cheerful, and with his usual amiability entirely unruffled.

Whilst the poor gentleman was endeavouring to persuade Arthur and the other remaining participant in the humours of the fray—Mr. Jack Bannister, to wit—to

accompany him to his club, there to make a night of it, they were pounced upon by a posse of constables, who, having waited until the marauders had made off, were anxious to show their courage and devotion to duty by seizing the bodies of any helpless persons they could lay their hands upon, and charging them with the high crime and misdemeanour of rioting.

It was in vain that Arthur and Mr. Jack Bannister endeavoured to explain. The Dogberry and Verges, having satisfied themselves that the party had not been left with a single crown between them, were perfectly clear that they must have been the chief promoters of the riot, pointing to their tattered clothes and battered friend as ample proof thereof. And so, totally unmoved by Mr. Neville's ineffectual attempt to shake hands with each and every of them, and his cordial,

though somewhat incoherent, invitation to the party in general to dine with his father on the following day, conveyed the unfortunate trio to the Round House.

Mr. Neville expressed himself quite satisfied with the accommodation, even going so far as to volunteer a song in honour of the occasion ; but to Arthur and Mr. Bannister's more fastidious tastes it seemed lacking in the refinement, not to say comfort, to which they were accustomed.

By dint of some entreaty, and the promise of a substantial bribe, the Earl of Grass-thorpe succeeded in persuading a runner to go for his family attorney, a gentleman resident in Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, who, upon his arrival, although he had never seen one of the party before—his lordship's business having invariably been transacted through Kirton—had no difficulty, perceiving them to be men of quality, in

identifying all three, and swearing that they had taken no part whatever in the riot. Indeed, so emphatic was he in his asseveration of their innocence that Mr. Bannister, who was a somewhat simple-minded gentleman, ever after remained under the impression that the lawyer had been an eyewitness of the proceedings.

This satisfactory testimony having procured their release, they adjourned to a night-tavern, where they caroused on the strength of a loan made by the lawyer to his client, the Earl of Grassthorpe, so long as the money lasted, when Mr. Bannister slouched to his lodging in Long Acre, and Arthur and Mr. Neville supported each other manfully till they sat down with considerable violence on the steps of the nobleman's mansion in Red Lion Square, and unintentionally used their heads as knockers with such effect as to

arouse the porter to a sense of their presence.

When that functionary opened the door the pair fell backwards headlong into the hall, locked in a clinging embrace; but, though somewhat elevated, Arthur felt a thrill of horror pass through him as the porter respectfully informed him that Lady Grassthorpe had recently arrived, and was awaiting him in the eating parlour—an announcement which caused the Hon. Thomas Neville to ejaculate, “Shtap my vitals, Croshbish, here’s a pretty kettle of fish!”

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNWELCOME MONITRESS.

CONSIDERABLY sobered by the unwelcome intelligence Arthur gazed in dismay at his vacant-eyed companion, and completely at a loss to divine his aunt's intention or mood. He had little time, however, for reflection, for the Hon. Thomas having, by a superhuman effort, pulled himself together, was making what looked like a bad sea passage for the eating room door.

"Don't be an idiot, Neville," Arthur hissed in a shrill whisper; "for Heaven's sake don't let my aunt see you in that state."

"Musht pay my 'spects, Lady Grashthorpe," retorted his companion severely ; "'sprised at you, Crosbish," and before Arthur could interpose to prevent him Mr. Neville had rolled against the door of the eating-room, which, yielding to the gentle pressure, brought him face to face with the old lady, who, wearied with her journey, had been dozing in a high-backed chair by the fire. She started up, broad awake at the unannounced entrance of a gentleman, and for the moment imagined that she saw an apparition.

A young man in the last stage of dilapidation, peering at her skewwise with his only practical eye, his face smeared in every direction with dried bloodstains, without wig, coat, ruffles or stock, his waistcoat torn open, and with his nether garments in an evident condition of embarrassing irresponsibility, at which he was clutching in an only

half-successful endeavour to keep them in their proper place, was a spectacle startling enough to warrant the old lady's gravest apprehension. She seized the bell-rope, about to summon the servants and request them to remove this drunken intruder, when the entrance of Arthur arrested her in the act. That young gentleman, although by no means in such sorry plight as his friend, was nevertheless in a deplorable condition of untidiness.

"Lady Grashthorpe, your mos' dutiful humble shervant," began the bewildered scarecrow, bowing profoundly at the imminent peril of losing his hold upon the main cause of his anxiety.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked her ladyship, in freezing tones, of her nephew.

"Meaning of which? asking your pardon, my dear aunt."

“ Which ! This disgraceful spectacle, to be sure. Who is this fellow, and what does he do here ? ”

“ Surely,” said Arthur, “ you recognize the son of your old friend, my Lord Hockslade, Mr. Thomas Neville ? ”

“ Your d’voted shervant, my —hic — lady,” interposed the Honourable Thomas ; “ d’lighted to shee your ladyship in such good health an’ shpirits. We are in good shpirits, ain’t we, Crobish ? ” he added, turning to Arthur. “ Been to shee quart bottle get into a member of Parliament ; no, I don’t mean that, I meansh been to shee theatre get into quar’ borrel. They made a bonfire of it in the round house. Gad, Crobish, lucky you didn’t come with me to club to make a night of it. Shouldn’t had pleashure of sheein her ladyship.”

“ My friend, Mr. Neville, has had the misfortune to engage, entirely against his will,

in an unseemly street brawl. You see him at a disadvantage, I assure you, my dear aunt ; but that you know."

"Asshure your ladyship, great dish-vantage, ladyship knowsh, man of dishcernment," asseverated Mr. Neville. "Don'tsh wantsh shpoil sport, will sit down," where-upon, making a fierce clutch at the aforementioned garments, which were showing increasing signs of a lack of responsibility, he staggered to a chair and proceeded to fall asleep with all possible dispatch.

"And now, my dear aunt, may I ask to what I am indebted for this unexpected pleasure ?"

"Where's Kirton ?" inquired the old lady, abruptly.

"Oh, gone to Bath," replied Arthur, incensed at her tone.

"I thought as much from the disgraceful goings on."

“Don’t flatter yourself, my dear Aunt Grassthorpe; Kirton is an inestimable gentleman; but I am master in my own house.”

“Humph! more’s the pity. Now, sir, I may tell you plainly that most disreputable accounts have reached me of your conduct.”

“Well, as it is merely the accounts which appear to be disreputable I can’t possibly object; but you will permit me to observe that my conduct is best known to myself.”

“Pish,” exclaimed the old lady. “You know what I mean, sir. I am in no humour for bandying words. See here, nephew; I am an old woman, and at my years one prefers to stay quietly at home; but the reports which have come to my ears of the sad life you are living left me no alternative but to take this journey. I am tired and irritable, but I am going to say my say all the same.”

“ I suppose,” began Arthur, “ that Kirton has been——”

“ No, sir, Colonel Kirton has had nothing whatever to do with it, he has been too desirous to shield you to play the spy upon your movements.”

“ True,” broke in the Honourable Thomas, who was notorious for his really remarkable faculty of waking up at inconvenient moments ; “ very dishon’ble thing, play the shpy, sh’prised ash you, Grashthorpe ; push the borrel ; dam thirshty work talking,” he mumbled to himself.

Finding that the bottle did not pass Mr. Neville straightened himself up, looking around in stupid amazement at things in general and evidently only half conscious of where he was.

“ I find the reports I have heard have not been exaggerated, sir,” continued the old lady with increasing energy ; “ look at the

disgraceful condition you are in at present, stopping out half the night drinking and brawling, exposing your life to every danger, and then bringing home with you yonder drunken beast——”

“Ladyship’s qui’ ri’,” assented Mr. Neville, “I am a drunken beasht; d’ye hear, Grashthorpe, am a beast; shorry, very—hic—shorry, going to reform, assshure you. Pash the wine, Crobish.”

“Poor Lord Hockslade,” muttered Lady Grassthorpe; “it is to be hoped that his sons are not all like this gentleman.”

“No,” moaned the Honourable Thomas, whose quick ears had caught the old lady’s soliloquy; “not like me, ’pon me word. Bill’s a fool, alwaysh wash a fool, and Everton’s never shober; hate a man thatsh never shober, I do.”

“I suppose you are as deep in debt as you

can well be?" questioned the old lady, ignoring the interruption.

"Yes; 'tis useless to deny it," said Arthur, doggedly; "but I fail to perceive what good it will do me, or what pleasure it can afford your ladyship, to remind me of my delinquencies. Being so particularly informed as to my movements, your ladyship, I take it, will have no difficulty in divining the cause of my embarrassments, which can hardly be matter for surprise to one so perfectly acquainted with the characteristics of the male Crosbys as yourself."

"Bad lot, male Crosbys," once more interrupted the Honourable Thomas, shaking his head sadly. "Gad, so they are, very bad, every one of them, all going to reform—hic—I mean all going to hell, quite 'gree with your ladyship. Very sad. For double your money gesh into a pint borrel—hic—stap my vitals, if he won't," he quietly gurgled to him-

self under a vague impression that he was once more inside the theatre.

Arthur started to his feet and rang the bell savagely.

"Not time for prayersh, no — hic — shpeaker," said Mr. Neville, who was by this time in the House of Commons.

The porter entered.

"'Shno use nabbing me," he explained to the man, whom he mistook for a bailiff, "washte of time, can't nab member of parliament, privileged ; go 'way, go away."

"Put Mr. Neville to bed," ordered Arthur.

"Yes, my lord ; which room is it your lordship's pleasure Mr. Neville should occupy ?"

"Oh, hang it ! any room, so long as you get him away."

Hereupon ensued an animated discussion between the porter and the affable Mr. Neville,

the former respectfully urging upon the latter the advisability of his retiring to rest ; to which our friend, with easy good nature, strenuously objected, until the porter, by a happy inspiration, remembered that there was a specially choice bottle of burgundy in the blue room, when the Honourable Thomas became suddenly anxious to take leave of Lady Grassthorpe and his host, and indeed verged upon the abrupt in his farewells.

When he had departed Lady Grassthorpe set herself in earnest to the accomplishment of her task. She put before Arthur, as forcibly as her sharp tongue and shrewd knowledge of men and manners enabled her to do, the inevitable and disastrous results of his courses. She begged, she entreated, she exhorted him by every motive of self-interest, no less than by every canon of family tradition, and every recognized principle of honour, to free himself from the thralldom of

the vices which were sapping his manhood and undermining his reputation.

Arthur listened with polite attention and some show of acquiescence ; but it would have needed no special penetration on the part of an astute observer to detect in his suppressed yawns and imperfectly restrained impatience unmistakable signs of boredom.

At length, when her ladyship had exhausted all her resources of persuasion, Arthur remarked with laboured quietness, "As you suggested some little time since, aunt, you are tired with your journey ; out of consideration to yourself I think we had better postpone the fuller discussion of these interesting topics until your ladyship is rested ; till then I have the honour to wish you a very good night. I can only add that whilst you continue to honour this house with your presence you will receive every consideration at the hands of my people."

He rang the bell, and, going to the door, bowed low as he held it open until the indignant countess had passed out.

Summoning his servant, Arthur ordered him to pack his trunks and have his travelling carriage in readiness to start for Tunbridge by eight o'clock on the following morning.

The day was what was then called "well-aired" when the maid who brought her ladyship's chocolate knocked at the door. This Abigail was also the bearer of a brief note to Lady Grassthorpe from her dutiful nephew, which informed her that he felt himself so unworthy of her consideration and so unequal of the task of further discussing his conduct with her that he had betaken himself to Tunbridge, where he purposed making an indefinite stay. Upon reading which the old lady, in high dudgeon, ordered her coach and departed.

CHAPTER XIII.

I WILL NOT GO—BUT AFTERWARDS REPENTED,
AND WENT.

It was the first snow, and a wild cruel night. The wind caught the snow and whirled it aloft again, as a peevish passionate child flings away the hand of its mother. It was too early for snow, and the autumn wind was savage at this intrusion of winter, and round and round it went in swirling eddies, intent upon outwitting and baffling the snow-clouds in their efforts to cover all things with the insignia of winter. It made a gallant fight ; but at length, not owning itself defeated, beat a hasty retreat, shrieking and whistling

sibilant curses upon its own impotence. Then the big flat flakes floated deliberately through the air, as if selecting in contemplative fashion the particular object upon which they intended finally to alight, How cold and helpless the trees looked, like mothers in a famine lifting their naked arms towards the unresponsive heavens.

Phil thought it was a bitter night as he trudged across from Campstock through Winterbourne to Hockley. He had not anticipated the snow, although he had expected foul weather from the lowering aspect of the day and the way in which the sheep in the meadows he passed were standing against any scrap of shelter, their faces to the west. He had been over to Campstock to bargain for a stack of corn from a ne'er-do-well yeoman, who had found that Philip Rose was a soft-hearted man, to whom a tale of distress never failed to appeal,

and he was much perplexed in his mind how best to justify to his mother the purchase of a commodity of which he had more than sufficient already, at a price exceeding the market standard ; for, though Phil had managed the farm for the past decade, Mrs. Rose never failed to demand a full and particular account of every farthing.

Now it was not absolutely necessary for Philip Rose to have touched even the outskirts of Winterbourne on his homeward journey ; but although he was fully aware that to see Elsie would militate against his peace of mind, yet to-night he could not prevail upon himself to forego the pleasure. Ever since that memorable walk which had sealed the good fellow's fate he had carefully avoided, so far as might be, coming in contact with Elsie. Phil was a sensible man, and once having persuaded himself that she not only did not love him, but loved Crosby,

he put away from himself for ever the one dream of his life.

To-night Phil was tired with battling against the wind and snow, and the picture of the bright fire in the saddler's kitchen was intensely alluring to him. He thought he might indulge himself just this once with safety ; he would satisfy himself that he had succeeded in his resolution to conquer his infatuation for Elsie ; he would prove to himself how indifferent he had become.

The still small voice of prudence whispered that he was deceiving himself, that he knew quite well that he had loved Elsie, did love Elsie, and should love Elsie to the end of the chapter. But then, he told himself, prudence was a muff, and did not know everything. He should have to meet Elsie in the natural order of things, so he might as well begin now as at any other time.

But when he reached the market-place his

heart failed him again, and he made up his mind that his wisest course was to go home and get warm and dry. So he crossed the open square and struck into the Hockley Road, where, by this time, the snow was lying smooth and deep.

So Phil plodded along the deserted and silent road; even in the town itself he had met no living soul, and scarce half a mile from the main street he heard the foxes yelping.

By the low wall which enclosed the mill-pond he stopped. Against that dark wall was a mass of something partly covered with snow, which struck him as unusual.

“’Tis a belated sheep,” he muttered, as he went towards it. “Poor beast! I must find a hovel for it somewhere; such a night as ’tis, too.”

By this time he was stooping over it. He started back and rubbed his eyes like a sleeper

who has dreamed, and looked around, fearful that the cold had numbed his reason, and stamped upon his eyeballs a nightmare mirage.

"'Tis a woman." And the ridiculous fancy of his brain had cheated him for a moment into the belief that the woman was Elsie.

He would look again, and disillusionize himself:—

"Yes—it is Elsie! I am awake—this is the Hockley Road—and that is the mill pool!"

Here the mass moaned, and one arm that had been lying across her breast fell lifeless and heavy into the snow wreath at her side.

"Elsie, my lass; Elsie—Elsie, dear, it is me—me, Phil; I am Phil, dear, don't you know me, Elsie? What does it mean?"

During these short disjointed sentences he

had mechanically torn off his coat and flung it over the girl's shoulders.

Elsie opened her eyes for a moment and gazed in lack-lustre fashion upon the familiar face; then the lids dropped, and, as a sigh escaped her parted lips, her head fell wearily upon the shoulder of the man who was kneeling by her side.

"Elsie—tell me—what are you doing here? Let me take you home, my lass."

At the word "home," Elsie opened her eyes again and feebly shook her head. Then, making a desperate effort to rise, she moaned :—" Oh no, no, not home ! not home ! let me go, Phil, let me go." Then she struggled to her feet, and, as Phil supported her, she continued :—" Let me go, Phil ; I can never go home again, never any more."

Philip's honest head bowed low, as if he felt the weight of the awful blow which had brought things to this bitter pass.

Then he said : “ No, Elsie, dear, you shall not go home, you shall come to the farm, and mother will tend you. So, let me help you. No, not that way, dear,” as Elsie groped along beside the wall and passed in at the opening which led to the millpool, lying black and still at their feet.

“ Aunt tend me ! me ! Aunt wouldn’t let me into the house ! She would spurn me from her doors, and I cannot bear that again ; no, not that again ! Leave me, Phil, let me go. I am not fit for you to touch.”

She reeled, and would have fallen but for the friendly wall against which she staggered ; then all her strength fled from her, and she slid in a heap among the snow. Phil saw that she had fainted.

“ Gadzooks, whaät be I to do wi’ the lass ? What a drouthy gowkhammer martel I ha’ bin to ha’ drunk up all the brandy ; a pretty plight I be in, truly ! Here be I, a mile

from anywhere ; 'tis not in reason I should wake folk up and shame Uncle Steele for evermore, or—dom Uncle Steele ! why should I mind for he ? Ay, but I should shame the lass. I'll e'en tak her home. Mother may tak on an' she pleases ; let en do her worst, the farm be my own, and has been nigh on this ten years ; tho' out'on consideration for she I ha' never put'en about, even to she. Howsumever, dom it all, a man mun show that he has a will of his own once and away, so to put it. Here goes," and stooping down he gathered the little bundle of unconscious womanhood in his brawny arms, as though it had been a sick child, so tenderly he raised it.

Now Philip Rose was accounted as strong a man as the country side could show ; but he found his task of carrying the girl over the mile and more of downside strained his endurance to the utmost. The way into

Hockley from Winterbourne was all uphill ; the snow made the roads heavy, and the keen night air filled his limbs with pain, despite the exertion ; his arms, too, were crooked and cramped, for his coat was wrapped about the girl, and though the straining effort made the sweat start to his brow, the icy-fingered frost seized it there and held it fast in his hair, so that his head was covered with rime. But he trudged manfully on until the light left for him in the kitchen of the old farmhouse assured him that he was nearing the end of his journey, at the same time that it gave him an uncomfortable feeling of his heart sinking somewhere into the region of his boots as he reflected that the hardest part of his task was yet to come.

He carried Elsie into the kitchen, and laid her tenderly on the long settle in the chimney corner, then went for wood and built up

the fire, after which he essayed to force a little brandy between the rigidly-clenched teeth, but without any success ; so, rubbing his steaming head ruefully, he muttered, " There ain't nothing for it now but to fetch mother. Well, 'tis to be done, so here's for it."

Phil kicked off his boots and softly ascended the stairs which led to his mother's room, and knocked at the door.

" That's thou, Phil, is it? And quite time, too. Be'an't ashamed o' thysen a keepin' me out o' bed? Thou shouldst ha' bin back in decent time, seeing that to-morrow be churnin' day. How be I to be up and after the maids, idle hussies, every one on 'en, if I'be kept out of my bed beyond the waking time. Thou'lt come to the poor-house 'an thee dunno' mend thy ways, my lad. But, Lord, I be a fool to talk to 'ee! Just as well speak to the sow in the midden as to thee."

“ Art dressed, mother ? ”

“ Why, dost want aught ? Sure thou art old enough to get it thyself w’out troubling a woman o’ my years. Well, what be it ? ” she asked querulously as she came out of the room.

“ ’Tis not for myself, ’tis for—— ”

“ Ay, for whom ? What good-for-nought hast ’ee picked up, now ? ”

“ ’Tis for Elsie Steele, mother. O, mother, ’tis a sad business ! Uncle Steele ha’ turned her out o’ home.”

Mrs. Rose gazed at him helplessly for a few seconds, too much astonished to make any reply.

“ Elspeth Steele ; what’s ’en turned her out for ? ”

“ What *should* he turn her out for, mother ? ” said the big fellow, blushing to the roots of his hair.

His mother looked at him curiously.

“ Oh—that be it, be it? Well, my words ha’ come true, they allus does.”

“ I found her by the mill-pool ; she were a’most dead from the weather. Bless the Lord I found her afore she’d come to her-sen.”

“ Where be she ? ”

“ I’ the kitchen.”

“ What hast brought her here for ? ” asked his mother, sternly. “ If she aint good enough for her father’s house she’ll find no shelter in mine, so I tell ’ee. There, stand aside, lad, let me go to her ; I’ll rout her out pretty soon, I promise ’ee.”

“ Nay, mother, she be but a weak lass, an’ ’tis a fearsome night.”

“ ’Tis good enough for the likes o’ ’she,” returned Mrs. Rose bitterly. “ I tell ’ee, lad, stand aside, thou art nought but a poor soft-hearted fool. I’ll have no defilement in my house, I tell ’ee plain.”

“Where is she to go, mother?”

“Go? e’en where she pleases to, an’ she don’t stay here.”

“Then she’ll be dead afore morning.”

“So much the better, an’ her shame die wi’ her! the jade, to bring shame on an honest house! She shall bring none on mine. Let her e’en die. I’ll turn her out. Stand aside, will ’ee!”

“No!” said Phil, very quietly.

“No! What dost mean?”

“I mean that I will not stand aside, and you will not turn her out.”

Mrs. Rose was completely taken aback. Could this be her son, to whom hitherto her word had been law? She was too dumb-founded to speak, so Phil continued: “’Tis not in nature to turn her out a night like this’un, whatever she has done. Go to her, mother, an’ be gentle with her, for her be in sore need o’ a woman’s comfort.”

“She’ll be in sorer need afore I’ve done with her. I wonder thou hast no more spirit than to take up wi’ a scarlet wench like she. Thou shouldst a’ had more respect for thy mother than to bring a fly-by-night under the same roof wi’ her. Comfort her, indeed! What right has she to be comforted? A hussy like that ’en should be whipped through the town at the cart’s tail. I’d have her ducked if——”

“Silence! I’ll hear no more. I won’t ha’ her turned out o’ the house.”

“An’ she don’t leave, I will.”

“Nay, mother, I’d be main sorry for ’ee to go; but if it comes to that I shall none stop thee; if thou goest ’tis of thine own will. No one shall be turned out o’ my house as has come here for shelter and refuge, not even if ’en was a rick firer and a wastrel. You will go to her mother,” he pleaded. “’Twas I loved her, not thou. Ay, but I

did love the lass, an' I'd a gi'en my life sooner nor harm should a' happened to she."

"I holds no dealings wi' Babylon, Philip. I touches no unclean thing."

"No, thou art more righteous than thy Saviour. 'Tis said He forgave one as was a sinner; but thou be more holy than He."

"Hush! hush! lad, thou be talking blasphemy!"

"If that be blasphemy, mother, I hope I shall be a blasphemer so long as I've breath in my body. Dost think he'd ha' turned the poor lass out like Uncle Steele's done?—dom him! Don't think if this were his farm he'd ha' let the lass go, to fling hersen i' the pond, mayhap? If he did, He'd be no Saviour o' men. No, mother, He'd help the poor lass. He'd none ha' condemned her wi'out a hearing. He'd ha' forgiven her, and told her to sin no more. If you mun go, mother,

you mun go, but while this place be mine I darena' turn her off."

During this speech Phil had unconsciously drawn himself to his full height, and, under the influence of the majesty of the Gospel of grace and mercy, which had welled up from the deep places of his heart, he stood before the astonished woman as one transfigured. She no longer stood in the presence of her shy and awkward son ; she was face to face with a gentleman, whose soul shone with a holy lustre upon his countenance.

Silently she passed down the stairway, cowed and awestruck. Elsie was still lying where Phil had placed her, motionless, and with a sort of elementary consciousness which told her that she was a stranger in a familiar place, entirely uninterested in her own identity.

Although Mrs. Rose had felt humbled at her son's rebuke, of which her deep-rooted

piety had compelled her, to some extent at least, to recognize the truth, she was still a woman to whom such a crime as she supposed Elsie to have committed was repulsive to her righteousness and incomprehensible from her ignorance of the power of sensuous temptation. For a moment she paused on the threshold, her face set and expressionless ; she had determined to tend the girl, because she was convinced that such was her duty ; but she would show no pity, no tenderness, lest she should appear to condone so terrible an offence. But the sight of the frail form outlined by the sodden and clinging garments, and of the pretty, child-like face, drawn and pallid, with the thick masses of dank hair all about it, from which the snow, having melted into water, dripped with sullen splash on to the stones, disarmed her hardness and dissolved her woman's heart to tears.

Swiftly she crossed the kitchen, and falling on her knees beside the girl, who had opened her eyes at her step, she threw her arms about the death-like form, and cried, as she gathered it to her motherly bosom, “Elsie, my poor little lass! my pretty child! Phil,” she continued, turning to her son, who had followed her down the staircase and now stood watching the scene from the doorway, “get thee gone, lad, get thee gone; this is woman’s work, an’ no place for thee. Get thee to bed, lad; but first light the fire i’ the long room, and get the blankets out of the press, and put the bed to warm, and light up the copper fire; we’ll want hot water enough, and go to my cupboard and get out some clothes—the poor child be wet as sop—and bring en’ down as quick as ’ee can, and bring in more kindling quick, an’—but there, I doubt if you’ll mind all that, such be thy

memory, and don't stand there like a hommerhoyden."

"Hadna' I best call the maids?" interjected Phil, bewildered.

"Nay, lad, nay;" then, as her eyes fell upon Elsie's face, she added softly, "for the sake of the poor lass none must know o't but oursen; thou and I mun do't all. Poor lad! thou'lt be in bad fettle for the farm i' the morning; but, Lord! in a case like this'en the farm mun go, an' it were harvest."

END OF VOL. II.

